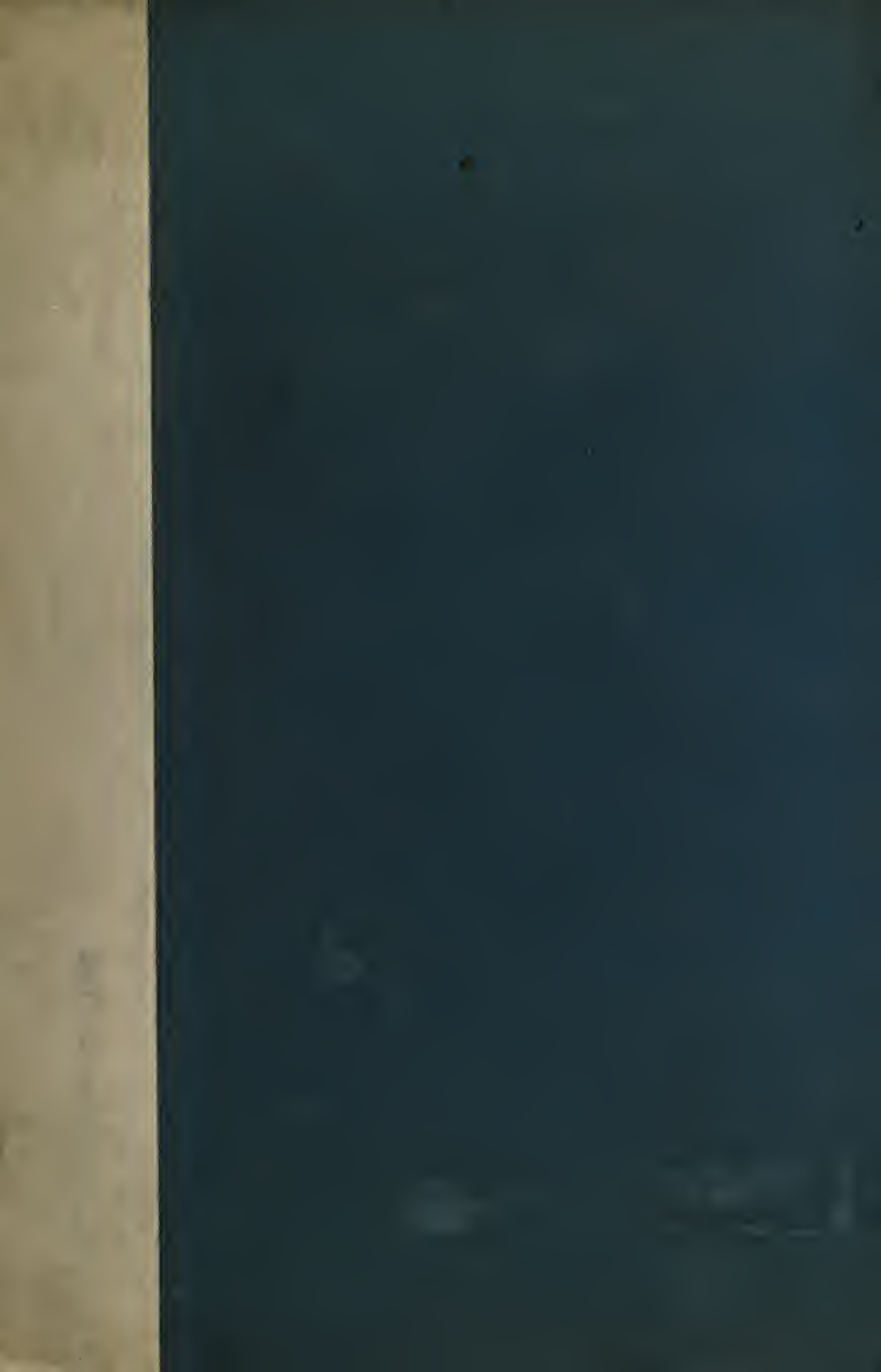




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CIVIL WAR

By the same Author

MODERN DRAMATISTS

(Björnson, Strindberg, Sudermann,
Hauptmann, Wedekind, Shaw,
Barker, Galsworthy, Schnitzler,
Hofmannsthal, Tolstoy, Gorky,
Tchekhov, Capus, Brieux, Maeter-
linck, Heijermans, D'Annunzio)

Civil War

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

By
Ashley Dukes



LONDON
STEPHEN SWIFT
10 John Street, Adelphi
1911

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This play was first produced by the Incorporated Stage Society on June 5 and 6, 1910, at the Aldwych Theatre, London, with the following cast:—

CAROLINE LATIMER.....	MISS ANNIE HILL
THOMSON	E. CRESFAN
MICHAEL LATIMER	FREDERIC SARGENT
SIR JOHN LATIMER	JAMES HEARN
RUPERT BLAKE	PHILIP KNOX
GEORGE LATIMER	ATHOL STEWART
MRS. DELLING.....	MISS FRANCES WETHERALL
MARGARET SHANNON	MISS PENELOPE WHEELER
JAMES SHANNON	J. FISHER WHITE
ROBERT MANSFIELD	LEWIS CASSON
JEANNIE DAWES.....	MISS MABEL KNOWLES

Civil War

THE FIRST ACT

[The scene represents a large, handsomely furnished room, with walls panelled in oak, and hung with family portraits. Two large windows in the background, each provided with a recess, offer a view of a formal garden. Near them, right and left, are two doors facing one another. They give the apartment an air of being what in fact it is—a gallery, or ante-room, in a house of considerable size. To the right is a fire-place, with a fire burning brightly. In the middle of the room is a round table, with a bowl of roses and a folded newspaper. The remaining furniture is orderly and comfortable. The time is nearly noon on a day in March, and the room is lit by morning sunlight.]

MISS CAROLINE LATIMER comes in by the door on the right. She is fifty years of age, very precise in speech and movement, and spinsterly, with a touch of the grand manner. She is about to cross over to the other door, but observes the newspaper, pauses for a moment, then goes to the door on the left, opens it, and calls.]

CAROLINE

Are you there, John? [SIR JOHN'S voice is indistinctly heard within.]—No. Not if you are busy. It will do later. [She closes the door, goes over to the fire-place and rings.]

[THOMSON appears]

CAROLINE [pointing to the newspaper]

How did this come here, Thomson?

THOMSON [*approaching*]
The Morning Post, ma'am? I can't say.

CAROLINE
Does it belong to the servants' hall?

THOMSON
No, ma'am. I read the *Daily Telegraph* myself, ma'am.
It does not arrive until one o'clock.

CAROLINE
You know Sir John objects to newspapers. Take it
away.

THOMSON
Very well, ma'am.
[*He is about to do so when MICHAEL enters. He is
twenty-three years of age, tall, well set up, and rather
bronzed, like a Colonial.*]

MICHAEL
Oh, Aunt Caroline . . . [*reaching for the paper*] I
say, Thomson, you can leave that.

CAROLINE
Is it yours, Michael?

MICHAEL
Blake got it at the station. He was reading about
the revolution in Spain.

CAROLINE
You may leave the newspaper, Thomson.
[*THOMSON does so, and goes out*]

MICHAEL
It's tremendously interesting.

CAROLINE
The . . . revolution?

MICHAEL [*nods*]
It began before we left Barcelona. We could see the

police-charges from the terrace of our hotel. And the street fighting.

CAROLINE [*without interest*]

I believe that sort of thing is constantly happening abroad. [*She takes a tobacco-pouch from the mantel-shelf.*] Is this Mr. Blake's too?

MICHAEL

No, that's mine. Aunt Caroline, is there any room in this house where one can smoke?

CAROLINE

You know your father objects to it.

MICHAEL

Yes. But I thought perhaps there was some place where one . . .

CAROLINE

There is the garden.

MICHAEL [*blankly*]

Er—yes, of course. Thank you, Aunt Caroline. This is the month of March.

CAROLINE

I don't think it can be good for you to smoke.

MICHAEL

Perhaps not. But I like it.

CAROLINE

That is not the point.

MICHAEL

I'm afraid I think it is. [*Going toward the door on the left.*] Is father in?

CAROLINE

Yes.

MICHAEL

Then I'll . . .

[*He is about to enter*]

CAROLINE [*hurriedly*]
Michael ! Surely you haven't forgotten——

MICHAEL [*turning*]
Forgotten what ?

CAROLINE
You can't disturb him now ! Before twelve o'clock !

MICHAEL
Twelve o'clock ? Oh, of course ! The Book ! Is he writing the Book still ?

CAROLINE
Why not ?

MICHAEL
Well, you know, books can't go on for ever ! You expect them to get finished——

CAROLINE
Some books.

MICHAEL
But not this one, eh ?

CAROLINE
That is for your father to decide.

MICHAEL
H'm—of course ! It must be ten years since he began. And so you still mount guard here, Aunt Caroline, to see that no one enters the Presence ? This is the ante-room, eh ? The Court of the Gentiles ?

CAROLINE
Don't scoff, Michael.

MICHAEL
Oh, I'm not scoffing ! But dear old father—and the Book ! The Treatise on Civilization !—You've all grown very like him. Just now, when you said "That is not the point," I heard *his* voice. Even Thomson affects

the grand manner. When he brings in coffee every morning I notice that air of preoccupation with affairs of state.

CAROLINE

Michael !

MICHAEL

Well, I suppose it's natural enough. And how goes the Book ? I don't believe father's been beyond the garden gate for years.

CAROLINE

He sent you to travel round the world, Michael.

MICHAEL

Yes. He sent me round the world. And when I came back the other day there he was, pacing up and down from the rose-garden to the sundial as if nothing had happened in the meantime. Nothing but the Book.

CAROLINE

That is everything to him.

MICHAEL

Oh, come ! Surely——

CAROLINE

It is the work of his life. Michael, let me tell you. Since you went away he has given up *everything* to his work. He sits in there sometimes for twelve hours at a time without food or drink. I believe he only takes five hours' sleep at night. I see his light burning when I go to bed, and he is always up before the servants in the morning.

MICHAEL

But surely he can't be writing all that time ?

CAROLINE

No. He reads a great deal, too. And he takes physical exercises with his dumb-bells—and that machine in his bedroom. You remember ?

MICHAEL [*stretching his arms*]
A thing like this . . . ?

CAROLINE

Yes. He says that is why he is never ill. [MICHAEL *nods.*] All the time you have been away he has thought of nothing but his work—and you.

MICHAEL

Me ?

CAROLINE

You are to help him, Michael. He says very little about it, but I *know* he is depending upon you.

MICHAEL

Yes. . . . I suppose . . .

CAROLINE

Michael, you won't disappoint him ?

MICHAEL

What does he want me to do ?

CAROLINE

I cannot tell you. I'm not clever enough to understand. I only know your education, and your travelling, and everything else had a purpose. [*Preparing to depart.*] Now I must see about lunch——

MICHAEL

Oh, I meant to tell you before, Aunt Caroline ! Blake and I will be out.

CAROLINE

Again ? That's the third day running. Every day since you came home.

MICHAEL

Well, the fact is . . . [*He pauses awkwardly*]

CAROLINE

Where are you going ?

MICHAEL

Oh, just for a walk. That is, I shall walk, and Blake will overtake me on his bicycle. He has to see father first.

CAROLINE

Michael, you're not going to Beacon Head again—to that Colony?

MICHAEL

Why not?

CAROLINE

Your father was greatly upset when he heard you had been there. The place has a bad name.

MICHAEL

That's only the nonsense the villagers talk. I like the people there. I don't care whether they are Socialists, or Anarchists, or Mohammedans. They're friendly and pleasant, and they live a free, healthy, open-air life. Besides, Blake's interested in them. Why shouldn't we go?

CAROLINE

They have a quarrel with your father about the land. They refuse to sell.

MICHAEL

Why should they sell? I like their independence. There's one splendid old fellow down there—the founder of the Colony——

CAROLINE

I have heard of him. He is a bad man.

MICHAEL

Oh, nonsense, Aunt Caroline!

CAROLINE

They are all wicked people. Their ideas are wicked. I know they are.

MICHAEL

How do you know?

CAROLINE

Your father says so.

MICHAEL

Oh, of course, if you . . . [*uneasily, with a show of cheerfulness*] Well, good-bye, Aunt Caroline !

CAROLINE (*anxiously*)

Must you go ?

MICHAEL

I—we promised.

CAROLINE [*with strong disapproval*]

Then—good-bye.

[MICHAEL goes out. After a moment she follows him. Presently the clock on the mantelpiece begins striking twelve, accompanied by the chimes of the distant church tower. The door on the left opens, and SIR JOHN LATIMER comes in. He is a tall, dignified old man, white-haired, stooping slightly. He wears an old-fashioned white cravat, and carries some papers in his hand. As he enters he takes out his watch and compares it with the clock. Having apparently satisfied himself that the machinery of the local universe is working smoothly and that it is in reality high noon, he crosses over to ring the bell, but pauses as his attention is arrested by the newspaper upon the table. For an instant he appears to hesitate, then he takes it up and opens it, glancing at the headlines. He evidently becomes interested, but turns to ring the bell, carrying off the newspaper to the fire-place. THOMSON enters.]

SIR JOHN

Ask Mr. Blake to be good enough to step this way.

[THOMSON goes out, after a swift glance of surprise at the newspaper. SIR JOHN becomes absorbed as he reads, and hardly notices BLAKE'S entrance. BLAKE is about thirty-five, of medium height, with a pleasant, confident air.]

SIR JOHN [*looking up*]

Ah—good morning.

BLAKE

Good morning.

SIR JOHN

Pray sit down. [BLAKE *seats himself on the other side of the table.*] I believe this is your newspaper? I glanced at it for a moment——

BLAKE

By all means.

SIR JOHN

I have not read a daily newspaper for the last twenty years.

BLAKE

Indeed?

SIR JOHN

It has always seemed to me that the papers are full of bad news rather than good news.

BLAKE

Perhaps you are right.

SIR JOHN

Personally, I prefer good news. However, I observed several items here which interested me. There was one paragraph dealing with flights which appear to have been made through the air in machines of some kind—I forget the exact term used——

BLAKE [*gravely*]

Aeroplanes?

SIR JOHN

Ah, yes. Precisely. I have heard something of the sort before. And these appliances are heavier than air?

BLAKE

Much heavier.

SIR JOHN

Indeed? Very striking! My scientific knowledge is unfortunately limited, but I should hardly have conceived it possible.

BLAKE

You evidently do not follow events very closely, Sir John?

SIR JOHN

I do not attach great importance to what is termed "the news of the day." To my mind, the man who stands most remote from the hurry and turmoil of his time is the man who is able to observe it most clearly. I learn much by correspondence with my friends, however. And from time to time I have the pleasure of conversing with a visitor.

[BLAKE bows]

SIR JOHN

As you know, I am a student. I hope I may say, a student of the art of living. I am engaged at present in writing a work to be entitled *The Meaning of Civilization*.

BLAKE

So Michael has told me.

SIR JOHN

That book is intended to be preparatory. I look to my son to carry its principles into effect.

BLAKE

If I may ask—what are these principles?

SIR JOHN [*leaning forward, with emphasis*]

I propose a complete reconstruction of civilized life.

BLAKE

Indeed? Isn't that rather . . . ?

SIR JOHN

I am aware of its difficulties. They can be sur-

mounted. In the first place, I propose a change of government.

BLAKE

I see. You are—a Conservative?

SIR JOHN

Not at all. You misunderstand me. I advocate the abolition of government by political parties or factions.

BLAKE

Pardon me . . . of course.

SIR JOHN

I propose in its place the rule of an hereditary leisured class.

BLAKE

An aristocracy?

SIR JOHN

Precisely. An aristocracy. With this difference, that its members, instead of serving their own ends as they do at present, will serve the interests of the State. They will be, in effect, trustees or guardians of the whole nation. They will govern it for its own good.

BLAKE

And if I understand you. . . . You look to Michael to carry out this—reform?

SIR JOHN

You grasp my meaning perfectly. I intend him to enter public life with that end in view. As you know, I educated him myself. I was able to give him full instruction in the classics, and particularly in Greek philosophy.—I make no secret of my own indebtedness to Plato and Aristotle.

[BLAKE *suppresses a smile*]

SIR JOHN

But I am first of all a student. I have little practical experience. I realized the necessity for Michael to gain some knowledge of the world and to study existing institutions. You were highly recommended to me as a suitable person to travel with him and to undertake his guidance. You have carried out this task to my entire satisfaction.

[BLAKE *murmurs his acknowledgments*]

SIR JOHN

I was about to add that I owe you a deep debt of gratitude. You will agree with me, however, that that remains to be seen.

BLAKE [*with some surprise*]

Certainly.

SIR JOHN

You have spent three years in visiting the principal cities of the world. I have, of course, kept your letters and Michael's. They have been deeply interesting.

BLAKE

I am glad.

SIR JOHN

The time has now come for him to use the knowledge he has gained. I shall no longer require your services. Although I have seen little of you personally, I am sorry.

BLAKE

Thank you.

SIR JOHN

If I can be of any assistance, I shall be delighted. I understand, however, that you are not seeking any similar occupation——

BLAKE

Not at present.

SIR JOHN

However, anything that I can do . . . [*rising*]. It will afford me great pleasure if you will extend your stay here as long as you feel inclined. I am sure I speak for my sister as well.

BLAKE

You are very good.

SIR JOHN

We are a quiet household, and I fear we cannot offer you much in the way of entertainment. I am not in the habit of molesting the birds or animals on my estate, and I usually ask my guests to show the same forbearance.

BLAKE

I understand.

SIR JOHN

There are, however, many places of interest in the neighbourhood. [*Pause.*] Ah—that reminds me. I gathered last evening that you and Michael had paid a visit to the so-called Communist or Anarchist Colony at Beacon Head.

BLAKE

We have been there several times.

SIR JOHN [*coldly*]

Indeed? May I ask for what purpose?

BLAKE

I am interested in the Colony. As you know, it has become quite famous in the last few years.

SIR JOHN

I was not aware of the fact.

BLAKE

At any rate, it's the only successful attempt of its kind in England. I was anxious to see it. Michael offered to act as my guide, and so we went.

SIR JOHN [*sharply*]

Michael knows nothing of the place.

BLAKE

Oh ? I understood he had been there before.

SIR JOHN

Not to my knowledge.

BLAKE [*hesitating*]

Ah ! perhaps I was wrong——

SIR JOHN

I have never paid a visit myself, although it lies within my property. I have no wish to do so. Mr. Blake, it is only fair that I should tell you the history of this Colony, so that you may judge for yourself.

[BLAKE *seats himself again*]

SIR JOHN

The land was bought from me some years ago, without any statement of the purpose to which it was to be put. I afterwards learned that the purchaser was a notorious Anarchist named Shannon.—When I discovered this, I made efforts to buy back the property at a higher price, but it was too late. The man refused to sell. I have never seen him, but he has sent me abusive letters. . . . Meanwhile a number of wooden houses were erected there, and the riff-raff of Europe collected in them. Many of the people are Anarchist refugees from various countries. Others are Englishmen—harmless enough, no doubt, but mistaken. . . . I believe

they hold the land in common, together with other forms of property. The place is held in disrepute throughout the district. It is said that the residents live together without the formality of marriage, and certainly they disregard all other conventions.—That is all I can tell you. I think it enough to justify my warning you against paying any further visits.

BLAKE [*hesitating*]

I am much obliged to you, of course . . .

SIR JOHN

At all events, you will understand that I do not wish *my son* to see any more of this—this Colony.

BLAKE

I wish I had known that earlier, Sir John. We had arranged to go there to-day.

SIR JOHN

I shall be obliged if you will pay your visit alone.

BLAKE

The fact is, Michael has already started. I was to follow him on my bicycle.

SIR JOHN [*after a pause*]

That is . . . unfortunate. However, it cannot be helped. I will speak to him this evening. I have no desire to restrict his freedom, but in this case . . . Good day, Mr. Blake.

BLAKE [*remains standing*]

May I have one more word with you, Sir John?

SIR JOHN [*distantly*]

By all means.

BLAKE

It's about Michael. You know we have become great friends. I think perhaps . . . I understand him.

SIR JOHN

He speaks very warmly of you.

BLAKE

I mean that perhaps I understand him . . . better than any one else.

SIR JOHN [*drawing himself up*]

Ah? Indeed?

BLAKE

Sir John, you have told me of your plans for him. You haven't asked me what I think of his fitness to carry them out.

SIR JOHN [*looking him up and down*]

I fail to see . . . Please explain yourself.

BLAKE

I will. First of all, you will admit that his education was peculiar.

SIR JOHN

Unusual.

BLAKE

Well, let us say unusual. I've noticed that people educated in an unusual way often behave unusually for the rest of their lives. They don't take kindly to the road mapped out for them. They have a trick of up-setting calculations.—Give a boy a few years of Eton and Oxford, and you set up a fixed tradition in his mind. All his life he will behave as if the eyes of Eton and Oxford were upon him. In public, that is. . . . But bring him up on Greek philosophy, and Heaven knows

what he may do at any moment. Possibly he will behave as if the eyes of Plato were upon him. In that case he may murder the nearest policeman, or blow up the Stock Exchange with dynamite.—Or he may just be himself, and act perfectly naturally according to his own convictions. Then he will be called a crank. For my own part, I like cranks. I like people who upset one's calculations. They make the world interesting. And—Michael is one of them.

[SIR JOHN *has listened to this with every sign of restlessness, developing into indignation.*]

SIR JOHN

Do I understand you to suggest——

BLAKE

That he may not fit into your scheme very neatly. That is all.

SIR JOHN

I have not asked for your opinion.

BLAKE [*quietly*]

Forgive me, Sir John. Good morning.

[*He turns to go*]

SIR JOHN [*hastily*]

Ah—stay one moment——

[*He is cut short by the arrival of THOMSON*]

THOMSON [*announcing*]

Mr. George.

[GEORGE LATIMER and MRS. DELLING come in. Both are fashionably dressed in riding costume. GEORGE LATIMER is younger than his brother, but he bears traces of a more epicurean habit of life. MRS. DELLING's age is a matter of speculation. Both she and George bring a devil-

may-care, incongruous atmosphere with them into the quiet room. GEORGE comes forward heartily.]

GEORGE

Hullo, John ! Hope you're not busy ?

SIR JOHN [*stiffly*]

Good morning.

GEORGE

Mrs. Delling and I just dropped in to have a look at you——

SIR JOHN [*bows*]

Good morning, ma'am.

[*A pause. GEORGE eyes BLAKE curiously*]

SIR JOHN

This is Mr. Blake. Mrs. Delling—my brother.

MRS. DELLING

How d'ye do ?

[*She seats herself carelessly on the edge of an arm-chair*]

GEORGE [*shaking hands*]

Glad to meet you. So you've been takin' Michael round the world, eh ?

BLAKE

We travelled together.

GEORGE

Been keepin' him out of mischief, what ?

BLAKE

I don't know that I can——

GEORGE

Well, well, no tales out o' school ! I met him yester-

day. The young beggar looks pretty fit. No nonsense about him now. I never saw such a change !

SIR JOHN

I don't understand you.

GEORGE

Why, three years ago—Good Lord ! The boy spent all his time mopin' about the downs with a book in his hand. 'Pon my soul, he was as shy as a girl—you couldn't get a word out of him ! Always readin' poetry—I believe he wrote the stuff ! But now—big, broad-shouldered, strong ! You should put him into the Army, John ! Just the figure for a smart cavalry regiment ! Now, I know a crammer——

SIR JOHN [*coldly*]

I have no intention of following your advice.

GEORGE [*undaunted*]

H'm ! Pity ! S'pose you'll send him into politics ? Dirty game, dirty game ; but he'll run straight enough.—Look here, I've an idea !

SIR JOHN

Indeed ?

GEORGE

What do you say to puttin' him up for this division at the next election ? Starling'll retire next year, and the Radical candidate won't have a smell. Devilish clever chap, but a rank outsider. We could put Michael in as easy as winkin'. Look at the start he'd have ! Knowledge of foreign policy, first hand, by Jove ! Colonial affairs—got 'em off pat ! Eh, Mr. Blake ?—Good Lord—why, he might end in the Cabinet !!

SIR JOHN

That would indeed be the end.

GEORGE [*without heeding him, glowingly*]

By Jove, that *is* an idea! Now, what do you say, John? I believe I could work it!

SIR JOHN

I have no doubt you could . . . work it. I prefer to make no comment.

GEORGE [*sadly*]

Well, well! Pity you're not more practical, John.

SIR JOHN

I am aware of my deficiencies.

GEORGE

Oh, I say, you know, I didn't mean——

SIR JOHN

Thank you. I understand perfectly.

GEORGE [*looking at his watch*]

Afraid we can't stop long. [*Pause.*] I say, old man, can I have a word with you?

SIR JOHN

I am busy this morning.

GEORGE [*making obvious signs to him*]

Just a word, you know——

SIR JOHN

Again?

GEORGE

Well, of course, if you take it like that——

SIR JOHN

Perhaps you will come into my study ?

GEORGE [*relieved*]

Oh, thanks awfully, old man——

SIR JOHN

[*Opens the door for him. Turning to MRS. DELLING*]
You will excuse me, ma'am ?

MRS. DELLING

Certainly.

[*GEORGE goes out, with a triumphant glance at MRS. DELLING. SIR JOHN follows him. When they are gone MRS. DELLING turns to BLAKE and laughs.*]

MRS. DELLING

Oh, I *do* think men are comical when they are trying to borrow money ! Don't you ?

BLAKE

Do you mean——

MRS. DELLING

Why, of course, didn't you know ? Sir John lives on about a third of his income, and that's so convenient for George ! I don't think George has got an income at all. Sir John has been lending him money all his life, and now it's become quite a habit. He hates it dreadfully, poor man, but he simply *can't* break it off.

BLAKE

I see.

MRS. DELLING

It all comes of poor George's race-horses. They are such *quaint* creatures. Not like other horses at all.

BLAKE

Really ?

MRS. DELLING

As soon as he buys them they always refuse to do anything but walk.

BLAKE

That must be very trying.

MRS. DELLING

Oh, dreadful ! And they are constantly biting the stable-boys. It's so expensive.

BLAKE

So Mr. George Latimer is a sportsman ?

MRS. DELLING

Oh, yes. He's always frightfully in debt, and he never minds.

BLAKE

That's not a bad definition. Are the creditors sportsmen, too ?

MRS. DELLING

Dear me, no ! They are most unpleasant about it. But what can you expect of tradespeople ?

[BLAKE *smiles grimly*]

MRS. DELLING

I think Sir John is an old *dear*. Don't you ? He always calls me "Ma'am." Did you notice ? I think it's so *sweet* of him. So *delightfully* old-fashioned.

BLAKE

Sir John is a perfect example of the old English gentleman.

MRS. DELLING

Yes, isn't he? [*Confidentially, coming nearer.*] Oh, Mr. Blake, I *know* you will tell me! Is it true—about Michael?

BLAKE

I'm afraid I don't follow you——

MRS. DELLING

Oh, you *must* know! *Do* tell me!

BLAKE

I am quite in the dark. Perhaps you will explain. . . .

MRS. DELLING [*in a lower tone*]

I mean about the girl at the—— [*She breaks off suddenly as the door opens.*]

BLAKE (*quickly*)

What girl?

MRS. DELLING

Hush!

[*SIR JOHN and GEORGE come in. GEORGE is just pocketing an envelope, with some satisfaction.*]

SIR JOHN [*to MRS. DELLING*]

I hope we have not detained you?

MRS. DELLING

Not at all. Mr. Blake has been so charming.

GEORGE

Now we must be off. Oh, by the way, John! You should keep an eye on Michael. The young dog'll be gettin' himself into hot water directly.

SIR JOHN

Indeed?

GEORGE

I hear he was seen down at the Beacon Head Colony the other day. You won't like that, *I* know.

[SIR JOHN *starts and is about to speak, but checks himself.*]

MRS. DELLING (*to* BLAKE)

Do you know we have a whole colony of Socialists here, Mr. Blake?

GEORGE

Communists, I believe they call 'em. (*Hastily*) Not that *I* know the difference.

BLAKE

I have already paid them a visit.

MRS. DELLING

Really?

[*She regards him curiously*]

GEORGE

'Pon my soul, the rummest lot of scarecrows you ever saw! And the womenfolk are the funniest of all! I could tell you some yarns! (*To* MRS. DELLING) Did you ever hear about the sun baths?

MRS. DELLING

No. *Do* tell Mr. Blake.

GEORGE

[*With immense relish, beginning his favourite story*] Well, you see, the whole blessed lot used to undress in the middle of the day and lie out upon the roofs of their houses for a—a sun bath! [*Gurgling with laughter.*] For . . . their . . . health! You never saw anything so screamingly funny in your life! [*He is convulsed.*] Jack Wardle and I were ridin' past one day, and when we heard what was on——

MRS. DELLING

I hope you rode away at once.

GEORGE

Not much ! We climbed up the hill to get a better view——

MRS. DELLING

Really !

GEORGE

——and there we found a crowd with——with opera-glasses and things ! [*Renewed convulsions.*] All come to see the show !

MRS. DELLING

Really, George !

GEORGE

The old village shoemaker had brought his t-t-telescope ! I told him he ought to know better at his age, and he said he was observing the t-t-transit of Venus !

[*The others laugh, but SIR JOHN remains very grave and still.*]

GEORGE

Ha, ha ! Well, now we really *must* be moving ! Good-bye, John ! And [*patting his breast-pocket*] thanks awfully, old fellow !

[*SIR JOHN bows to MRS. DELLING. MRS. DELLING, GEORGE, and BLAKE go out, leaving SIR JOHN alone. After a moment GEORGE returns.*]

GEORGE [*coming forward with hesitation*]

By the way, old man——

SIR JOHN [*turning*]

Well ?

GEORGE

I thought I'd better give you a hint about Michael. Just between ourselves.

SIR JOHN [*quickly*]

What is it ?

GEORGE

I mean about his goin' down to Beacon Head.

SIR JOHN (*drawing himself up*)

I prefer not to discuss that any further.

GEORGE

Wait a bit. You haven't heard me yet——

SIR JOHN

Is there . . . anything else ? Tell me ! [*Gripping his arm.*] Tell me quickly !

GEORGE

Well, I shouldn't be surprised if there was a petticoat in it somewhere.

SIR JOHN [*tightening his grasp*]

A—a woman, do you mean ?

GEORGE [*nods. A pause*]

Good God, man, let go ! You'll break my arm !

SIR JOHN

[*His hold relaxing, staring vacantly*] Michael ? No, it's a lie ! It can't be . . .

GEORGE [*alarmed*]

I say, you mustn't take it to heart. . . . But I have heard of a nice bit o' goods down there. . . . The old man's daughter, you know. . . .

SIR JOHN [*rigid, motionless*]

Michael . . . ?

GEORGE

Well, no great harm done, I dare say. . . . Bit of a

scrape . . . might happen to any youngster. Thought I'd just give you the hint. . . . [*Another pause.*] I say, you're not ill? John——

SIR JOHN [*almost hurling him backwards*]

Go! Leave me alone!

[*GEORGE looks at him, wavers an instant, then goes out.*]

[*SIR JOHN, alone, reaches for the support of a chair, then with an effort recovers himself, strides to the bell, rings. THOMSON appears.*]

SIR JOHN

Has Mr. Blake started?

THOMSON

Just this minute, Sir John.

SIR JOHN

Get me a horse!

THOMSON [*unable to believe his ears*]

Sir John . . .?

SIR JOHN

I said—get me a horse! D'ye hear me, man?

THOMSON

Very good, Sir John.

[*Goes out*]

[*SIR JOHN gathers up his papers hastily, and turns to the door as his sister comes in.*]

CAROLINE

John, George says you're ill. . . . What has happened?
[*She stands between him and the door*]

SIR JOHN

Let me pass!

CAROLINE

John! Tell me what has . . .

SIR JOHN (*peremptorily*)

Stand out of my way!

[*She obeys mechanically. He goes out*]

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

[SHANNON'S house at the Communist Colony, Beacon Head. The walls are of plain wood, and the room is simply, almost barely, furnished. A door in the background leads directly into the open air. Near it is a window, affording a view of the Colony, which consists of a number of similar wooden houses dotted over the hill-side, and surrounded by patches of cultivated land. Along the wall on the right is a trestle bed. To the left is a door leading into another room, and near it a stove with a bent chimney. In the middle is a rough deal table, set for a meal, with chairs.]

At a smaller table near the window JAMES SHANNON is seated. He is an old man with grey hair and beard, roughly dressed like a workman in corduroy clothes. He speaks with the accent of Belfast.

MARGARET comes in, carrying some dishes. She is simply dressed, and wears an apron for household work. She goes over to the stove, places food upon the table and arranges chairs. SHANNON sits motionless.]

MARGARET

[Looks at him once or twice, as if unwilling to disturb him] The dinner's ready, father.

SHANNON [without moving]

Aye, Maggie.

MARGARET

Mr. Mansfield's coming in, father. You remember—he said we were not to wait for him.

SHANNON [*turning*]

And why are ye calling him "Mister" Mansfield, Maggie?

MARGARET

Robert Mansfield, I mean.

SHANNON

That's better. Aye—I remember.

[*Still he does not move*]

MARGARET

[*Goes over to him and lays her hand upon his shoulder*]
What is it, father?—Why, that's the page you were at last night!

SHANNON

'Tis true. I'm in no mind to-day for writin' the book.
[*He slips an arm round her waist.*] D'ye know what the date is, Maggie?

MARGARET

The eighth, father.

SHANNON

Aye. The eighth of March. And it was the tenth o' March your mother was murdered. Twenty years ago on Monday. Butchered by the Prussian police. May they rot in hell!

MARGARET [*caressing him*]

Father!

SHANNON [*rising*]

Ye shall wear black, Maggie, on that black day. And a white flower at your breast for the brave deed that she did. 'Twas written in the list o' the dead: "Ilsa Weber, of Polish birth. Shot while leadin' the strikers and incitin' to violence."—There was the best woman

in the world, Maggie, gave her life for the poor. And whether ye live or die, may you do the same !

MARGARET [*taking his arm*]

Come, father !

SHANNON [*refusing her support*]

Let be—I need no help. I can fight the rich yet, for many a day. If I cannot travel the world as I did, I can write my book with the best of 'em. The brain's the youngest part of a man, Maggie. And the brains are on our side. The best brains and the biggest hearts—God bless 'em !

MARGARET

(*Seats herself on his left and begins cutting a loaf of bread. A knock is heard at the door. She calls*) Come in !

[ROBERT MANSFIELD *appears. He is a young man dressed in a white flannel shirt and green trousers, with a scarlet sash for a belt. His legs are bare, and he wears sandals.*]

SHANNON

Come in, brother. Sit ye down.

[MANSFIELD *takes the seat on his right. SHANNON reaches over and grasps his hand.*]

SHANNON

That's a fine pair o' breeches ye have on, Robert Mansfield. Ye didn't wear *them* when ye were at Oxford, I'll be bound !

MANSFIELD

No. But I hadn't taken to fruit-growing and the simple life then, you see.

SHANNON

Is it the simple life ye call it ?

MANSFIELD

That's what my friends call it, when they write to me. I don't find it at all simple to get a living.

SHANNON

Ye'll not go in that costume when ye take your goods to market, I'm thinking ?

MANSFIELD

No. This is for the fields. When I drive my cart into town I'm the picture of respectability.

SHANNON

Aye, when ye drive your cart into town. . . . We all have to smarten up a bit then, eh ? There's Maggie here put on her fine new dress this morning, because ye were comin' to dinner.—Eh, Maggie—that was it ?

MARGARET

Oh, father. . . .

SHANNON

There—ye've no need to blush !

[MANSFIELD *looks across to* MARGARET, *who avoids his glance.*]

SHANNON [*to* MANSFIELD]

They tell me ye were talkin' politics the other night, out Sunfield way ?

MANSFIELD

We held a meeting.

SHANNON

Aye. So I heard.

MANSFIELD

You don't approve of that, I'm afraid ?

SHANNON

Ye can do as ye please. We're all free men and women here. But I'll tell ye my own belief, an' it's this. There never was any good came of political parties, and never will be. They're nothin' but a trick o' the governin' class to fool the people. Nothin' but dust thrown in the eyes o' the poor, to blind them to their misery. Aye—I could tell ye some tales o' politics and governments! I've seen governments elected for their promises o' liberty call out hired soldiers an' shoot down their people in the streets, because they dared to cry for justice!

MANSFIELD

But surely you don't mean that all governments are unjust?

SHANNON

There's good, bad, and indifferent. I'd as soon have the bad ones as the good. They're all the tools o' the rich. Look about ye, man! Isn't it the rich that make wars and the poor that pay for them? Isn't it the rich that make laws and the poor that crowd the prisons? Isn't it the rich that boast of their free country and leave the people free to starve?

MANSFIELD

I believe there are some of the rich who would give justice to the poor.

SHANNON [*bringing down his fist upon the table*]

Never! That's one o' the lies they told ye at Oxford, my boy! The rich love the poor, they say. Aye, as a drover loves his cattle, bred for the slaughter-house!—Oh, ye'll get sympathy enough from them—a bellyful o' sympathy that costs them nothing! But justice—never! When ye've seen as much of the world as I've done, ye'll know that for yourself. The governin' class—the class that drains the blood of the people——

MARGARET [*leaning over to him*]
Father! You know you mustn't excite yourself
so——

SHANNON
Aye, aye!
[*He pushes back his chair*]

MARGARET
You haven't finished——

SHANNON
I'll eat no more. There—get on with your dinner and
let me be!
[*He goes out. A pause, as MARGARET and MANSFIELD
remain seated opposite one another.*]

MANSFIELD
I'm afraid I upset your father.

MARGARET
'Tis nothing. He has his moods, like the rest of us.
—Shall I give you some more bread, Robert Mansfield?

MANSFIELD
No, thank you. I have done.

MARGARET [*rising*]
You'll be wanting to talk to him. [*Going towards the
door.*] I'll——

MANSFIELD
You know it was *you* I came to see, Margaret.

MARGARET [*turning*]
Me?

MANSFIELD
You know that.

MARGARET [*in a hard voice, without looking at him*]

Are you wanting to make love to me again, Robert ?
[*He is silent.*] Then I'll give you my answer now. I know my own mind, Robert Mansfield. And I've no mind to marry you. I'm not fond of you—that way.

MANSFIELD

Is that the answer you would have given me a month ago ?

MARGARET

Why not ?

MANSFIELD

Margaret. I saw you—the night before last.

MARGARET

Where ?

MANSFIELD

On Inchmore Hill. With a man. He kissed you.

MARGARET [*her breath quickening*]

Were you spying on me ?

MANSFIELD

Margaret !

MARGARET

Oh—I don't mean that——

MANSFIELD

It was dark. I passed by on the other side of the wood. I knew it was you by your voice.

MARGARET

And—— ?

MANSFIELD

I recognized him too. By the long cloak that he wore.

MARGARET

You know—who it was ? [MANSFIELD *bows his head.*]
Were you alone ?

MANSFIELD

Yes. [*Pause.*] Margaret, I must speak of this. We have been friends, you and I. You must tell me——

MARGARET

What you saw was all there is to tell.

MANSFIELD

Then you—love him ?

MARGARET

Yes, Robert.

MANSFIELD

Is that all ?

MARGARET [*simply*]

That's everything.

MANSFIELD

You are right. There's no more to say.

[*Turns away a little*]

MARGARET

I'm sorry, Robert. For you.

MANSFIELD

Does your father know ?

MARGARET

Not yet.

MANSFIELD

It's hard—for him.

MARGARET [*with a little catch in her voice*]

Oh, Robert, I can tell you I never was so sorry—
or so glad—in my life as I am this day !

MANSFIELD

Is that a riddle ?

MARGARET

Maybe.

MANSFIELD

I can guess the answer. Good-bye, Margaret.

MARGARET

Good-bye.

[*He goes out.* MARGARET, alone, goes to door at back, half opens it, and looks out, as if expecting some one. Presently she returns, takes a book from under the mattress of the bedstead, and is about to read when SHANNON returns. She slips the book hurriedly into the bosom of her dress and begins clearing the table.]

SHANNON

Has Robert gone ?

MARGARET

Yes.

SHANNON [*with a keen glance at her*]

Just now ?

MARGARET

This minute, father.—Won't you finish your dinner ?

[SHANNON mutters a refusal and goes over to his writing-desk.]

[MARGARET busies herself at the table. A knock is heard.]

SHANNON

Come in !

[JEANNIE, an old woman, appears. She is dressed in an old grey jersey, with a faded green skirt. Her hair is white, and she has a shawl thrown over her head in place of a hat. She speaks slowly, nervously, with a constant jerky twitching of the hands. As she enters, MARGARET looks at her but makes no movement or sign of recognition.]

SHANNON, *however, rises at once and goes to greet her warmly.*]

SHANNON

It's you, is it, Jeannie? Come in, man, come in!
[*Taking both her hands in his.*] Why, you're cold!

JEANNIE

Aye, it's the cruel wind about my house. It sets me shivering these days. And I thought maybe you'd be having a bit of a fire——

SHANNON

Why, of course, of course! Bring a chair, Maggie!
There! Sit ye down and warm yourself!

JEANNIE

[*As the chair is brought, looks up half fearfully at MARGARET*] I—I thank you.

[*She crouches over the stove*]

[*MARGARET busies herself again at the table during the following, only glancing at her father and the old woman from time to time.*]

JEANNIE

Aye, that's better. It's a warm house ye have here.

SHANNON

Ye're always welcome.

JEANNIE [*with a furtive glance at MARGARET*]

Your daughter's growin' a fine strong girl.

SHANNON

Aye.—Maggie, ye might come and sit with us a bit.

MARGARET

[*Over her shoulder, as she folds up the cloth*] Presently, father.

SHANNON [*to JEANNIE*]

Do ye remember the old days in New York—how we used to sit around the fire on winter nights? At Garstang's?

JEANNIE [*slowly*]

The old days. . . .? Yes, I remember. That was before I went to prison.

SHANNON

Aye.

JEANNIE

It was cold in the prison. Bitter cold. Five winters I had there.

SHANNON

I know.

JEANNIE

Then they gave me my ticket to London, and barred me out o' the States as an agitator. . . . Aye, I'm not like to forget. But I don't think on it much now.

[*She rises*]

SHANNON

Ye're not goin'?

JEANNIE

I only came to ask if you could spare me a few sticks o' firewood—

SHANNON

That we can. [*To MARGARET.*] Maggie, some o' that wood I was choppin' yesterday—[*MARGARET goes towards the door on the left.*] And see here—[*in a lower tone*]—put in a packet o' tea with it, and anything else that's about. . . .

[*MARGARET goes out*]

JEANNIE

Are ye still writin' the book ye talk of ?

SHANNON

Aye, Jeannie. "The Conquest of the Land." There it is! "The Conquest of the Land"—that's our old call to arms, eh ?

JEANNIE [*peering*]

Me eyes are bad. I can't read like I used to. And what with me rheumatism, and one thing and another. . . .

SHANNON

Aye, ye've suffered more than most of us in your time, Jeannie. God bless ye !

JEANNIE

[*Looks at him with an odd, questioning glance, as if trying to recall something*] It's old age come upon me. Bitter it is.

SHANNON [*cheerfully*]

Stuff and nonsense, Jeannie ! Why, there's twenty years in ye yet ! And this fine spring morning, with your good looks—why, it's trying to turn my head ye are !

JEANNIE [*slowly*]

No. It's the long winter, never will pass. Old age upon me.—*You're* growin' old too, James Shannon. You're not the fine man ye were.

SHANNON [*taken aback*]

Eh ?—Well, well, maybe ye're right. But we'll not grumble. We've had our turn. Eh, Jeannie ?

JEANNIE

Aye—our turn.—I had a letter from my son yesterday. Him that's in Philadelphia.

SHANNON

I remember. And how is he ? At the good work, eh ?

JEANNIE

No. He's got married. Respectable. Goes to church twice every Sunday. He wouldn't look at me now, I'm thinking. That's the way. You grow old, and your children leave ye. Bitter it is.

SHANNON [*tenderly, taking her arm*]

Never mind, Jeannie. Come and see us oftener. When ye please. It's not all children that leave ye. There's Maggie now——

JEANNIE

Aye.

[*She looks at him with the same questioning glance.*]

[*MARGARET returns, carrying a bag of straw such as workmen use.*]

SHANNON [*gives it to JEANNIE*]

There's your firewood. Shall I carry it home for you ?

JEANNIE [*her fingers tightening upon it quickly*]

No. I can take it myself. Good day to you, James Shannon, and thank you.

SHANNON [*holding the door open for her*]

Good day, Jeannie !

JEANNIE [*turns to MARGARET, who stands motionless*]

And——good——

[*Her farewell dies away in a murmur and she goes out*]

SHANNON

[*Stands in the doorway, watching her, then comes back*]

Poor Jeannie !

[*MARGARET makes no reply, but gets out some sewing and begins to work.*]

SHANNON

Ye didn't welcome her as I should like, Maggie.

MARGARET [*without looking up*]

She smelt of whisky, father.

SHANNON

Maggie !

MARGARET

You know it's true, father. You know she drinks whenever she can get the money. She just lives on your charity, like two or three more of them !

SHANNON [*coming to her*]

See here, Maggie ! I'll have ye speak of Jeannie Dawes with the proper respect that I show her myself. 'Tis not what she *is* that matters ; 'tis what she *was*. You're young yet, and maybe ye don't understand. But I can tell you she was a brave woman, and before ye were born she was fighting for the rights of the people. She spent the best years of her life in a prison, and she came out whitehaired and broken as ye see her to-day. I'll trouble you to treat that woman as ye would your own mother, Maggie. Then maybe when *you're* old and withered, and your beauty's gone and your mind grown dim, you'll be glad to find some one that remembers what ye were and loves ye for the days when your body was young and your heart on fire !

MARGARET [*passionately*]

I'll never be like she is ! Never, never !

SHANNON [*his face growing graver*]

Maggie, that was the voice of a coward ! What is it that ye fear to lose ? Your beauty or your youth ? We must all lose *them* sooner or later. But the bravest man or woman is the one that gives youth and all for

the freedom of the people, as that woman did. Next time she comes to this house let me see ye rise up and take her hand. D'ye hear me ?

MARGARET

Was she like my mother—when she was young ?

SHANNON

There was never any one like your mother, Maggie. Never. But Jeannie Dawes was a great woman once. Promise me that ye'll treat her kindly.

MARGARET

I'll try, father. It's only——

SHANNON

Only what ?

MARGARET [*haltingly*]

She's like so many of them here. I don't know who they were or what they did . . . long ago. I only see them as they are. . . . I can't understand all you say . . . it's so strange——

SHANNON

Aye, Maggie. I know what ye mean. You've grown up here, shut out from all the world, and how should ye understand ?—Well, be yourself, child, while ye may. Live while ye're young. You shall be free. I'll not complain.

MARGARET

Oh, do you mean that ? Do you mean that I am free ?

SHANNON

Why, yes, Maggie.

MARGARET

—Free to do just what I want ?

SHANNON [*looking at her keenly*]
What is it that ye want ?

MARGARET [*breathless*]
Free to go away—if I choose ?

SHANNON [*slowly*]
To go away from here ? [*Pause.*] So that's what ye're wantin', is it ?

MARGARET
Father ! You're not angry with me ?

SHANNON
No, Maggie, I'm not angry with ye. [*Taking her by the shoulders.*] Tell me, child—how long has that thought been in your mind ?

MARGARET [*avoiding his glance*]
I—I don't know——

SHANNON
How long have you been afraid to look me in the face ?
[*MARGARET looks up proudly*]

SHANNON
That's better. Now, Maggie, I'm goin' to have a plain talk with ye. You've been hiding things from me of late. [*MARGARET makes a quick movement.*] Ye've been hiding your thoughts from me.—Maybe ye're not to blame there. You're young, and I'm—not so young as I was. But ye've hidden other things as well. [*He goes to his desk and takes a pile of books and papers from the lower drawer.*] I found these two days ago, Maggie.

MARGARET [*quickly*]
They're mine. I—I bought them from an old pedlar.

SHANNON

'Tis not my business how ye got them, Maggie. Why did ye conceal them from me?

MARGARET

I knew you never had papers in the house——

SHANNON

That's true. I need no rich man's press to lie to me about the world.

MARGARET

And so I—I put them away——

SHANNON

Well, take them now, child. Read them, if ye will. Ye shall please yourself. Only—don't hide them from me. [*He pushes them toward her, but she makes no movement.*] There's the book ye have in the bosom of your dress, too. Ye can take it out and read it. [*She obeys mechanically.*] Oh! there's more lies hidden in your breast than that book. I know. Now sit ye down and read what ye will.

[*She seats herself. He turns away to his desk. Presently MARGARET begins sobbing, her head between her hands.*]

SHANNON [*coming to her*]

Eh, what's that? What now? [*His hand upon her shoulder.*] Maggie! Now, maybe ye'd like to tell me all about it, eh? Let's make an end of secrets from each other.

MARGARET [*looking up*]

Oh, I can't, I can't! [*She rises and turns away from him.*] Don't ask me now, father! Not yet!

SHANNON

It shall be as ye will. [*Pause.*] I can see, Maggie, I'll not be calling ye "child" much longer. When ye have

that look in your eyes, ye've come to be a woman. I'm thinking, too, I'll not have ye with me long, Maggie.

MARGARET

Oh, father, you won't hate me for wanting to go away ?

SHANNON

Ye know I shall not. God knows it'll be hard to lose ye—but I'll not make a slave of any woman. The day ye want to go, the door stands open. I need no woman about the place, just to cook my food for me or do the housework. I never asked that of your mother, and I'll not ask it of you. Ye shall be a free woman, as she was. Ye shall choose your own way to live.—I never hoped to keep ye with me always. We're wanderers, Maggie, every one of us here. Strangers in the world. No matter if for twenty years we call a house our home—we're wanderers still. 'Tis no easy way of living, but 'tis the best way. Never to ask leave of any man, but just to go your own road when the mood's upon ye. Aye. That's the life.—There's many things can rule a man, Maggie, beside the law and the police. Out there—in what they call the real world, God help 'em !—there's few that can be free. Crawlين' through life, they are, tied to their work and their play, their houses and their churches, or their bits o' property and furniture. Tied of their own choice. It's more comfortable like. You'll see, when ye go among them.—But that way's not for you and me, child. Life's too short for crawlين'. It's too big for slavery. There's no house or home can count for anything beside the free will of men and women. It's no friendship that's for ever askin', and no love that's always holdin' back.

MARGARET

Oh, father, how good you have been to me—always—!

SHANNON [*bending over her*]
There, Maggie ! Did ye think I couldn't trust ye ?

MARGARET
Trust me . . . ?

SHANNON
Aye. Ye have your mother's eyes, child. I can trust ye. I know whatever ye choose to do will be right.
[*A knock at the door*]

SHANNON
Come in !
[*BLAKE and MICHAEL appear. MARGARET takes a step forward. She and MICHAEL exchange glances.*]

SHANNON
Good day to ye both ! So ye've come to have another look at us, eh ?

BLAKE
I'm afraid we're disturbing you——

SHANNON
Not at all, not at all. We're always glad to see visitors. Have ye had your dinner ?

BLAKE
Thanks—we lunched on the way——

SHANNON
Ye should not have done that. We keep open house here. But sit ye down. [*To MICHAEL*] Sit down, young man.

MICHAEL
Thanks.

BLAKE
We didn't want to take up too much of your time, and I thought perhaps you would be good enough to give us

an introduction to the Mr. Mansfield you spoke of. Then he could show us——

SHANNON

Aye. First let me ask you one question, Mr.—— ?

BLAKE

My name is Blake. [*Indicating MICHAEL*] This is——

SHANNON [*waving him aside*]

I thank ye. It's no matter. As a rule we ask no questions of our guests. Their names are nothing to us, and our names are nothing to them. They come and go as they please, and we make them welcome. Most of our visitors are men and women on tramp, as I told you before. [*BLAKE nods.*]—But now and then we get busy-bodies who come to make mischief—journalists and the like. D'ye follow me ?

BLAKE

I understand.

SHANNON

What I want to ask you is this, Mr. . . . Are ye writing anything on what ye've seen here at the Colony ?

BLAKE

Nothing.

SHANNON [*turning to MICHAEL*]

And your young friend here ?

MICHAEL

Nor I.

SHANNON [*rising*]

I thank ye. Ye'll not mind my askin' ?

BLAKE

Not at all. I understand perfectly.

SHANNON

We have enemies enough, as ye may guess. Two years ago, I may tell you, it was not safe for one of us here to set foot beyond the gates.

BLAKE

Really ?

SHANNON

Many a dark night there's a stone come crashing through the windows, while we sat here.—This is the nearest house to the roadway, ye see.

MICHAEL

What a shame !

SHANNON [*shrewdly, turning to him*]

Aye. If I may say so, young man, I think ye were not brought up in a house where a stone comes through the window now and then. I was. 'Tis one o' the privileges ye receive for thinkin' different from your neighbours. Ye can get used to it right enough. Eh, Maggie ? [*He lays his hand upon her arm.*—There was one night they tried to set the house afire. My daughter saved us then. She turned the hosepipe on them, and they ran for their lives. (*He laughs grimly.*) Three big men, and hadn't the pluck of a louse !

MICHAEL

Were they villagers ?

SHANNON

Aye. Village folk. But they're harmless enough, poor fellows. They were egged on to it by their betters. [*Contemptuously.*] Their betters ! The parson and the squire !—The parson did me the honour to preach a sermon against me. He wished me a warm place in hell, so I hear. And as for the squire—that's Sir John Latimer, Baronet, of Barton Priory—the big white house upon

the hill. Ye can see it at the turn o' the road.—He's a rich scholar, they say—writes books. Well, they're all alike—bloodsuckers and thieves!

[MICHAEL *is about to interrupt*. BLAKE *signs to him to be silent.*]

SHANNON

Aye! They've tried stoning us out and burning us out, but we're still here! And here we stay! Eh, Maggie? [*Going to the door.*] Now, if ye'll come with me, I'll show ye the way——

MICHAEL

Oh—could you give me a glass of water? I——

SHANNON

That we can. Maggie!

[MARGARET *goes out*]

MICHAEL

I'll follow you in a moment.

SHANNON [*at the door*]

The path lies straight up the hill.

[BLAKE *looks doubtfully at MICHAEL, hesitates a moment, then follows SHANNON. As soon as they are gone MARGARET comes in.*]

MICHAEL

Margaret!

[*She comes to him shyly. He takes her in his arms.*]

MARGARET

Dear! [*Breaking away.*] Hush! Are they gone—right away? [MICHAEL *nods*]

MARGARET

[*Goes to door, shuts it, then returns*] You'll think me bold, Michael. . . . But I can't let you go yet awhile! I can't! [She *clings to him*]

MICHAEL

Did you find my note ? I left it by the milestone——

MARGARET

I found it.

MICHAEL

I couldn't come last night. I tried to get away, but it was no use. They stayed talking after dinner—father and Blake——

MARGARET

It's no matter. I knew you must be kept. I shall always know if you don't come, dear.

MICHAEL

Margaret, I must tell you—I believe some one has found out——

MARGARET

Found out ? Do you mean—about us ?

MICHAEL

Blake was asking questions as we came along——

MARGARET

About me ?

MICHAEL

Yes. And how long we had known each other——

MARGARET

Did you tell him of three years ago ?

MICHAEL

I said I knew you before I went away.

MARGARET

Will he tell your father ?

MICHAEL

I must tell him myself.

MARGARET

Michael ! What will he say ?

MICHAEL [*turning away*]

I—I don't know.

[*Pause*]

MARGARET

You heard what *he* said just now, Michael ?

MICHAEL

I heard.

MARGARET

There's bitter hatred between them. Bitter war between your house and my house. You know that, Michael ?

MICHAEL

I know.

MARGARET

Then—you *do* know what he'll say ?

MICHAEL

I *must* tell him. You don't know my father.

MARGARET

And you don't know *my* father, Michael. Oh, I can see how it will be ! It's all been so wonderful until to-day. Just the two of us together. But now every one must know. We shall have to talk of—everything that doesn't matter. There will be angry words and—trouble. But I *can't* give you up, Michael. I can't, I can't !

MICHAEL

Nor I you, sweetheart. It will still be just the two of us together.

MARGARET

Do you remember the night three years ago—the night before you went away ?

[MICHAEL *nods*]

MARGARET

We stood high up on the downs there, by the old sheepfold. And you called me your white princess.

MICHAEL

I remember.—“ The white princess that I met on the roads.”

MARGARET

That was what you always called me then. And you said : “ I’m going away to sail around the world, princess. Perhaps I shall come back a wise man.” Has that come true, Michael ?

MICHAEL

Don’t you think so ?

MARGARET

Have you seen all the sights of the world ?

MICHAEL

No, dear—only all the hotels.

MARGARET

I’ve never been anywhere. I’ve never seen anything. When I was five years old my father brought me here from Berlin. I just remember that—and coming through London. . . . And since then—Michael, you won’t laugh at me ?—I’ve never been further than Barminster.

MICHAEL

I’ll never laugh at you, dear. What does that matter ? It’s *you* I want, *you* !

MARGARET

Ah, Michael !

[*He kisses her*]

MICHAEL

If I were wise, I should go now.

MARGARET

They won't be back yet. And it's only—a little while together.—Do you remember—*then*, when I was your white princess—how you used to stoop down and kiss my hands ? Every night you did that.

MICHAEL

I think I was afraid of you then.

MARGARET

I was never afraid. Never.

MICHAEL

It was all a great adventure.

MARGARET

Isn't it an adventure still ?

MICHAEL

Yes. The greatest of all.

[*He catches her in his arms and draws her to him. SHANNON is seen passing the window, and an instant later appears at the door, followed by BLAKE. MARGARET and MICHAEL move hurriedly apart.*]

SHANNON [*quickly*]

What does this mean ? [*He looks dazedly from one to the other.*] Maggie !

MARGARET [*entreatingly*]

Father—you can see——

SHANNON [*turning fiercely upon MICHAEL*]
Who are ye ?

MARGARET [*holding him by the arm*]
Father !

SHANNON [*shaking her off*]
Who are ye, I asked !

MICHAEL
If you will let me explain——

SHANNON [*grimly*]
Aye, there'll be a lot to explain ! Now let's have it !

BLAKE [*interposing*]
Mr. Shannon——

SHANNON
Hold your tongue ! [*Facing MICHAEL*] Let's have it !
[*A loud knock at the door. SHANNON turns angrily.*]

SHANNON
Who's there ?
[*SIR JOHN enters. SHANNON turns and stares at him.*]

SIR JOHN
Mr. Shannon, I believe ?

SHANNON
This is my house. What do you want with me ?

SIR JOHN
[*Courteously, but with suppressed excitement*] My name
is Latimer. I trust you will pardon the intrusion——
[*SHANNON takes a step backward, with clenched fists.*]

SIR JOHN
My business is with my son. [*To MICHAEL*] You will
return with me at once.

SHANNON
Are you—Sir John Latimer ?

SIR JOHN [*quietly*]

I am.

SHANNON [*pointing to MICHAEL*]
And that's your son—that young devil there?

MARGARET [*catching his arm*]
Father!

SIR JOHN
That is my son.

SHANNON [*shaking himself free*]
Then take yourselves out of my house, both of ye,
and never set foot in it again!

SIR JOHN [*trembling*]
Sir! I have no desire——

SHANNON
D'ye hear me? Then go! Or by God I'll not keep
my hands off ye!
[*He grips the back of a chair*]

MARGARET [*holding him back*]
Father! What are you saying?

SHANNON [*falls back, gasping for breath*]
Let me be! Let me be, I say! [*With an effort*] Dogs!
Dirty dogs that ye are!

SIR JOHN
Michael! What does this mean?

SHANNON [*breaking out*]
I'll tell ye what it means! That young cur there's
been sneakin' into this house after my girl, to ruin her!
Aye! Your damned aristocrats at your old game—
the old game ye've been at since the world began! The
sons of the rich and the daughters of the people!

SIR JOHN

Michael—is this true ?

MICHAEL

No, father, I——

SHANNON [*facing him*]

Ye lie ! Ye young cur, ye lie ! Didn't I find her in your arms a minute ago ?

SIR JOHN

Michael !

SHANNON [*with bitter mockery*]

Aye, " Michael, Michael ! " Take him home with ye and let him lie to ye again ! My girl's no peasant's daughter ! She's no light o' love for such as you ! Show them the door, Maggie !

MICHAEL [*coming forward*]

Will you allow me one moment, sir ? I have a question to ask.

SHANNON

I'll hear no more——

MICHAEL

One word, before we go.

SHANNON [*after an instant*]

What is it ?

MICHAEL

Margaret—will you marry me ?

SIR JOHN [*crying out*]

Michael !

[*Dead silence. They all turn to MARGARET*]

MARGARET

I will, Michael.

SHANNON

By God, ye shall not, while I live ! [*To MICHAEL*]
Get out, man, before I break every bone in your body !

MICHAEL

[*Without answering him, looking her in the face*] You've
promised, Margaret !

[*He turns and goes out. SHANNON makes a step to
follow him, then stops short, face to face with SIR JOHN.
The two men look at one another.*]

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE I

[The scene is the same as in the first act. The room is empty as the curtain rises. SIR JOHN enters, crosses over and rings the bell. THOMSON appears.]

SIR JOHN

Has Mr. Michael returned ?

THOMSON

Yes, Sir John.

SIR JOHN

Send him to me. And—I will see no one else, Thomson.

THOMSON

Very good, Sir John.

[He goes. MICHAEL comes in]

[SIR JOHN motions him gravely to sit down. MICHAEL seats himself.]

SIR JOHN

We have much to say to one another. Let us come straight to the point. First of all, how long have you known this woman ?

MICHAEL *[protesting]*

Father, I must ask you——

SIR JOHN [*coldly*]
I shall be obliged if you will answer my question.

MICHAEL
It began three years ago.

SIR JOHN
So that was where you went—in the evenings?

MICHAEL
Yes. We used to meet on the downs.

SIR JOHN
Ah! And——?

MICHAEL
Then I went away. We didn't write any letters. We
agreed not to. [Pause]

SIR JOHN [*gravely*]
Go on.

MICHAEL
When I came home we met again. I——

SIR JOHN
Well?

MICHAEL
Oh, I can't tell you any more! I love her! That's
all. If you only knew——

SIR JOHN
What are your relations with her?

MICHAEL
I don't understand you.

SIR JOHN [*slowly, deliberately*]
I asked—what are your relations with her?

MICHAEL

Why, surely you don't suppose——

SIR JOHN [*inexorably*]

I suppose nothing. I desire you to answer my question.

MICHAEL

I have asked her to marry me.

SIR JOHN

I am aware of that.

MICHAEL

There's nothing more.

SIR JOHN [*looking at him steadily*]

You have always told me the truth.

MICHAEL

I am telling you the truth now.

SIR JOHN

Then I believe you. I am glad to find that it is not too late.

MICHAEL

We have nothing to be ashamed of.

SIR JOHN

That is no excuse for a blunder. You have committed a blunder, Michael. You have behaved—as I do not expect my son to behave.

MICHAEL

Father, I warn you. If you take that tone you make it very hard for me——

SIR JOHN

You have made it very hard for yourself.

MICHAEL [*rising, impatiently*]

This is no time for talk ! Something must be *done*—quickly ! I can't bear to think of her there—at that place ! Her father's mad with anger. He hates me—he hates all of us ! He might do something desperate.—Father, you must ask her to come here for a time, until——

SIR JOHN

Until what ?

MICHAEL

Until we can marry——

SIR JOHN

That is impossible.

MICHAEL

Do you mean——?

SIR JOHN

I mean what I say. I shall do all that lies in my power to prevent any such wild-cat adventure.

MICHAEL

Oh, I know you have a quarrel with the people there——

SIR JOHN

That does not influence me in the least.

MICHAEL

And, of course, you don't believe in their ideas——

SIR JOHN

Do *you* ?

MICHAEL

I don't know. What do they matter ?

SIR JOHN [*flashing out suddenly*]

Ah, there we have it ! What do they matter ? The beliefs that men have lived and died for—they are all to count for nothing beside the passion of a moment ! Away with them ! What do they matter ? say the young. Give us happiness ! Give us the love of women ! Let us live !—The young are selfish, Michael.

MICHAEL

I understand now. Margaret said to me this morning, " There's war between them. Bitter war between your house and my house."

SIR JOHN

She was right.

MICHAEL

But what have *we* done ? It's not *her* quarrel. It's not mine. Father—I love her. What does it matter to me who her father is or what he believes ? All that is nothing to me. I want *her*.

SIR JOHN

My boy, you are very young.

[MICHAEL *makes an impatient gesture*]

SIR JOHN

You have not yet learnt that the real barrier which divides men into classes is a difference of belief. Of ideas, as you call them. It is not a difference of wealth, or even of what is termed education, but a difference of attitude towards life, of creed and conduct.—At your age you are attracted to people merely because they are interesting, or agreeable, or beautiful. That is all very

well in its way, but it is not enough. Real intimacy demands something more—harmony of thought.

[*He pauses*]

[*MICHAEL is silent*]

SIR JOHN

I do not wish to reproach you. You tell me that you love this young woman, and I have no doubt that she is as attractive as—young women of her age commonly are.

MICHAEL [*protesting*]

My dear father——!

SIR JOHN

Unfortunately, however, she is greatly mistaken.

MICHAEL

You don't know that——

SIR JOHN

Pardon me. I judge men—and women—by the company they keep. Her father is a dangerous man, holding highly objectionable views.

MICHAEL

Surely that's a matter of opinion——

SIR JOHN

Precisely. It is *my* opinion. I trust it is also yours. [*Taking a bundle of papers from the table before him.*] If you doubt what I say, I have here the details of this man's life. I took the trouble some years ago to make myself acquainted with his history. It was at the time when he first settled here—for reasons of my own. [*Taking up the papers one after another.*] He seems to have come originally from the North of Ireland. The first record I have of him is in Glasgow in 1866, where he led a strike riot and was imprisoned for six months

with hard labour. Afterwards he went to Italy, and served under Garibaldi in the insurrection of 1869. He was taken prisoner by the Government and deported——

MICHAEL [*interposing*]

Father, need we go into all this ?

SIR JOHN

You will be good enough to hear me out. [*Resuming.*] He next appeared in Paris, where he was associated with a notorious woman named Louise Michel, known as the Red Virgin of the Commune. After the overthrow of the Commune in 1871 he visited America, where he was welcomed by the Anarchists, and again imprisoned in 1876. He reappeared in various outbreaks in Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and Stockholm during the following years, and finally had to take refuge in London, where for a time he edited a revolutionary journal called the *Whirlwind*. I have read a number of his books and other writings. They are all highly inflammatory.—He retired in 1895 to this so-called Colony at Beacon Head, and since then he has contented himself with writing violent tirades against the private ownership of land, which he stigmatizes as robbery. [*Pause. Very deliberately*] I find no evidence that he was ever married, but he lived for some time in Berlin with a woman named Ilsa Weber, who was executed for her part in the Polish Rebellion. She was probably the mother of his child.

MICHAEL [*involuntarily*]

Margaret . . . ?

SIR JOHN [*gently*]

It was my duty to tell you this, my boy. My very painful duty. You must not take it too hardly. When the first shock is over—when you realize what you have escaped—you will be thankful to me.

MICHAEL

What I have escaped . . . ? [*Facing him.*] Do you think *that* will make me give her up ?

SIR JOHN

[*Warningly, his lips tightening*] Michael !

MICHAEL

Everything you say may be true. I knew most of it before. It makes no difference to me. No difference at all. Do you understand ?

SIR JOHN

I sympathize with your feelings. They do you credit. But, believe me, this is a mistaken chivalry——

MICHAEL

Ah, you think *that* ? I tell you that I want her above all else in the world, and you call it chivalry ! Listen to me. If Margaret's mother had been the lowest woman of the streets, if her father were a thief and a murderer, I should give you the same answer—that I will marry her to-morrow, if she will have me. Chivalry, you say ! Far rather call it selfishness ! I do it because I *must*.

SIR JOHN

Be careful, Michael ! You are playing with fire.

MICHAEL

Isn't that what love means ? Isn't it always—playing with fire ? Can we help ourselves ? Can we stop to argue or calculate about it ? Isn't it a thing beyond our control, sweeping into our lives for good or evil, unthinking, irresistible ? When *you* married, did you—calculate ?

SIR JOHN [*drawing himself up*]

Your mother came of a good family. I am happy to say she was in full accord with my views.

MICHAEL

Always ?

SIR JOHN

Of course !

MICHAEL

And that never seemed to you—strange ?

SIR JOHN

Certainly not.

[MICHAEL *regards him with the ghost of a smile*]

SIR JOHN

[*Gravely, in an altered tone*] Michael, I am an old man. You have much on your side—youth, passion, enthusiasm. Against them I can only set the experience and thought of a lifetime. That is the issue between us. It is reason, not passion, that counts in the end. You shall not ruin yourself if I can prevent it.

[*A knock at the door. BLAKE enters hurriedly*]

BLAKE

Can I have a word with you, Sir John ?

SIR JOHN

Not at present. We are busy.

BLAKE

Thomson tells me that Shannon is at the door, and wishes to see you.

SIR JOHN

Send him away.

[MICHAEL *takes a step forward quickly*]

BLAKE

Forgive me, Sir John, I think you are wrong——

SIR JOHN

I am not aware that I have asked for your views.

BLAKE

Sir John, you are making a great mistake——

SIR JOHN [*peremptorily*]

Send the man away. I cannot see him.

MICHAEL

I'll go down——

SIR JOHN

You will do nothing of the kind. [*To BLAKE*] Please tell him that I am busy.

BLAKE

Very well, Sir John. [*He is about to go*]

SIR JOHN

Stay—I will send Thomson with the message.

[*He goes out*]

BLAKE

Well, how are things going?

MICHAEL

Badly. Deadlock.

BLAKE

So I should imagine. No hope of a settlement?

MICHAEL

None at all. I must go.

BLAKE

Now ?

MICHAEL

The sooner the better.

BLAKE

You take my breath away. Things seem to be moving pretty fast with you to-day, young man. I can't keep up with an express train.

MICHAEL

Will you help to prevent a smash ?

BLAKE

Eh ?

MICHAEL

Listen. Before he comes back. That post at the Colonial Office. The thing you spoke of yesterday——

BLAKE

Well ?

MICHAEL

Is it still open ?

BLAKE

For all I know.

MICHAEL

Wire to them at once. I'll take it. Wire that I'm on the way—will begin on Monday. I leave it to you. Will you see me through ?

BLAKE

Are you sure this is wise ?

MICHAEL

Certain. Will you do it ?

BLAKE

Very well. I never argue with people who are certain.

[SIR JOHN *returns*]

SIR JOHN [*to BLAKE*]

Will you be good enough to leave us alone ?

[BLAKE *goes out with a nod to MICHAEL*]

MICHAEL [*to SIR JOHN*]

Has he gone ?

SIR JOHN

I gave Thomson orders to send him away.

MICHAEL

Father, that was brutal of you.

SIR JOHN

The man is a dangerous ruffian. I have telegraphed to Barminster to have him watched by the police.

MICHAEL

To have him . . . ? That's monstrous ! I shall——

SIR JOHN [*towering over him*]

You will remain in this room. Sit down !

[MICHAEL *faces him for a moment, then obeys.*]

SIR JOHN [*controlling himself with an effort*]

That tone must cease. [*More calmly*] You understand now that I shall not consent to this marriage ?

MICHAEL

I understand.

SIR JOHN

You can of course dispense with my approval. In that case I must decline to meet your—your—this woman.

MICHAEL

I understand that too.

SIR JOHN

I need hardly remind you that you are entirely dependent upon me——

MICHAEL

Thank you, father. I shall be glad if you will stop my allowance at once.

SIR JOHN [*hesitating*]

I did not intend to use that threat——

MICHAEL

It was unnecessary. I'll return your cheque for this quarter.

SIR JOHN

No, no ! I don't mean that——

MICHAEL

I do.

[*Pause*]

SIR JOHN

Michael, this is madness ! You do not know what such a marriage means.

MICHAEL

I think I do.

SIR JOHN

It means shutting yourself off from your family, your friends, every one——

MICHAEL

Haven't *you* shut yourself off from them, these twenty years and more ?

SIR JOHN

That is another matter. I had my own work to do.

MICHAEL

And suppose *I* had my own work as well ?

SIR JOHN

You ? In the midst of an ignorant mob of demagogues, fanatics, revolutionaries, criminals——

MICHAEL

My dear father, let's be reasonable. I don't propose to emigrate to Beacon Head or any other Colony. And if ever I join the criminal classes, I'll give you due warning.

SIR JOHN

You cannot escape their influence. This woman is one of them. She must be infected with their poisonous opinions. If you marry her, you go over to the rabble to which she belongs.

MICHAEL [*interrupting angrily*]

Father——!

SIR JOHN

No, sir, you shall hear me out ! A rabble without regard for statesmanship, or decency, or order—the dregs of the earth ! I know their catchwords. When they talk of their love for the poor, they mean hatred of the rich. Their justice is universal plunder, their freedom is slavery, their revolution is chaos. They can destroy, but they can never create. They will break down whole empires in a day. The wisdom and the learning of all ages is nothing to them ; it is less than the dust beneath their feet. They would give it all for food and drink. That is the only appeal they will listen to—the appeal to the stomach.

MICHAEL

Oh, you are wrong ! I know you are wrong !

SIR JOHN

Everything that *we* stand for, everything that we have stood for these hundreds of years, they loathe and despise. Dignity, leisure, sober judgment, order——

MICHAEL

Who are " we " ?

SIR JOHN

Our family, our class——

MICHAEL

Uncle George, for instance——?

SIR JOHN

I—I do not deny that there are exceptions——

MICHAEL

Plenty of them.—No, father. When you say " we," you mean *you*. You stand for these things. I often think that you stand almost alone.

SIR JOHN [*uneasily*]

Michael !

MICHAEL

Oh, don't let us speak of it any more ! We shall never agree. You see people only as classes. You label them as " the rich," " the poor," " the governing class," " the rabble," and so on. . . . I see them only as individuals—just men and women, all very much alike at heart. If you only know how I hate that very word " class " !—how it rises up against me everywhere I go, shutting me out from decent human intercourse with the very people I want most to understand ! Outside

our own friends, Margaret is the only woman who has ever treated me as an equal.

SIR JOHN

Why have you not told me this before ?

MICHAEL

I saw that you were wrapped up in your own plans for me. It grew harder every day to tell you. But now it must all come out.—You want to make a statesman of me. Well, it's no use. I can't do your work. I'm not fit for it.

SIR JOHN

That will come in time——

MICHAEL [*with conviction*]

It will never come. Ah, can't you see that we are different, utterly different at heart ? There's something in me—something that revolts at everything you believe.

SIR JOHN [*shrinking back*]

Ah !

MICHAEL

This is nothing new. I've felt it growing for years. I hated the way you brought me up. I couldn't express what I felt then, even to myself, but it was there. It was *in* me. I was glad to get away. It wasn't *you* I hated—it was the system ! [*Pause.*] And now—I mean to go to London and work for myself. I need no money. I'll live on what I can earn——

SIR JOHN

You ?

MICHAEL

Why not ? Blake is finding me something to do——

SIR JOHN

Ah ! I thought as much ! Mr. Blake is at the bottom of this——

MICHAEL

No. He's helping me, that's all.

SIR JOHN

Michael, for the last time ! Think what you are doing, I beg of you !

MICHAEL

I have made up my mind, father.

SIR JOHN

See. Perhaps we have both spoken hastily. If you had leisure to think the matter over——

MICHAEL

There's no time to lose.

SIR JOHN

You have not only yourself to consider——

MICHAEL

No. There's Margaret.

SIR JOHN

I was not referring to her. There is your family——

MICHAEL

Father, let's be frank with one another. I told you just now that the family means *you*. You rule this house. There's no one here dares move hand or foot without your approval. You are the only one who counts. We have come to a point where we can't agree any longer. You think I am wrong. I know I am right. You are strong-willed. Well, I am strong-willed too. Neither

of us can give way. There's only one thing to be done. I must go.

SIR JOHN [*with a sudden outburst*]

I say you shall not ! I will not allow it ! [*Stammering.*] Do—do you think I have given twenty years of my life to educating you, for *this* ? Years of thought, endless pains given to every detail ! And you—you stand there and tell me that I have spent my strength for nothing ! All to be ruined by a woman, a—a bastard from the gutter ! Come to your senses, sir ! I forbid this folly ! I say I will not allow it !

MICHAEL [*quietly*]

I owe everything to you. There is not a single thing I possess that you have not given me. You gave it all freely. You can never take it back. I can never give it back. Don't think I'm ungrateful. It's not that. I'm only sorry that I can give you nothing but trouble in return. It's not a fair exchange, but we can't help that, either of us. I go my own way because I *must*. It's what you have always done.

SIR JOHN [*in a low voice*]

Michael !

MICHAEL [*coming to him*]

Forgive me.

SIR JOHN

Are you going—there ?

[*They face one another. MICHAEL does not reply. SIR JOHN reads his answer, and draws back a little, holding himself very straight. MICHAEL turns and goes out. For a moment SIR JOHN remains motionless ; then he turns to the table, and endeavours to bind up his little roll of papers. But his hands tremble. The papers fall and are scattered, and he sinks into a chair.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

[SHANNON'S house, as in the second act. Evening. As the curtain rises the stage is in darkness but for a glimmer from the stove. MARGARET comes in, goes to the table and lights a lamp. A tap is heard at the window. She listens intently. The tap is repeated, and she crosses over.]

MARGARET [*calling in a low voice*]

Who is it ?

MICHAEL [*outside*]

Margaret. Are you alone ?

[*She holds the door open for him, and he comes in*]

MICHAEL [*taking her in his arms*]

Ah, my dear ! You're not hurt ? I was afraid for you. Is your father——?

MARGARET

No. He's not here. Hush ! We must . . . [*She draws the curtains and shuts the door. Then*] You should not have come here. It's not safe. To-day, after you had gone——

MICHAEL

What happened ? Tell me !

MARGARET

No, no, it's nothing——

MICHAEL

He hurt you. I can see. You've been crying. . .

MARGARET

No, dear, it's over now. . . . But I know that look in his face. And I could feel him all trembling. I thought he would have killed me.

MICHAEL

He said nothing?

MARGARET

Not a word. Then he went out—tramping up the hill and over the downs. That was hours ago. I've not seen him since. I waited and waited until it grew dark, and then I lay in there upon the bed, wondering—ah, Michael——

MICHAEL

What, darling?

MARGARET

Wondering if I should ever see you again.

MICHAEL

Margaret!

MARGARET

They're all trying to drag you away from me——

MICHAEL

Who are "they"?

MARGARET

Everybody. I can feel it. Your father. Your friend who was here. Other people too. I know. But I'm stronger than they are. Tell me I'm stronger than they are!

MICHAEL

Dear, you are stronger than all the world!

MARGARET

Ah !

MICHAEL

I came to tell you—I'm going to London to-night.

MARGARET

So—you've left them ? [MICHAEL *nods.*] Have *I* done that ?

MICHAEL

You've done it all, dear. See how strong you are !—
But I shall come back soon. To-morrow. My work
will be settled then, and we—but never mind that now !
Time's too precious.

MARGARET

I'm glad I saw your father. I always thought of him
like that. He looked kind—and sad. Does he hate me,
Michael ?

MICHAEL

Ah——

MARGARET

He must hate me. I was so sorry for him. I'm sorry
for every one to-night.

MICHAEL

For me too ?

MARGARET

Ah, no ! I'm glad of you ! So glad !

MICHAEL

Darling !

MARGARET

I saw my father's look to-day when he came in and
found us here. It was—as if a light had gone out. Some
little lamp that had been burning there for years and

years. And then suddenly—gone—like that!—Your father was the same, Michael. I wonder—are they too old to change? Shall *we* be like that some day?

MICHAEL

Margaret, darling, never mind them. I want *you*—as you are now!

MARGARET

Ah, yes. We must forget them. We must be hard. Can you be hard-hearted, Michael?

MICHAEL

Dear!

MARGARET

We must forget everything—leave it all behind. It will be easy—if you really want me.

MICHAEL

Ah, you know I do!

MARGARET

But you must be sure. If you were not, I couldn't bear it. You must never do anything just for *my* sake, dear. You must never pity me. It's dreadful to be pitied. . . . You must never think "Poor Margaret! what will she do? I can't leave her in the lurch."—If you thought that, I could never go with you. I'd sooner live here always. I'll have nothing that isn't given freely.

MICHAEL

Nor I.

MARGARET

You mean that, Michael? You're sure?

MICHAEL [*holding both her hands*]

Sure! We ask no favours—neither of us!

MARGARET [*yielding herself to him*]

Ah, then—don't let's talk of it any longer! I'm so tired of thinking. . . . And nothing matters now!

[*A knock at the door*]

MICHAEL [*quickly*]

What was that? Did you hear?

[*Another knock. As MARGARET goes to the door JEANNIE appears. She has evidently been drinking, and moves unsteadily, but without staggering.*]

JEANNIE

Is James Shannon at home?

MARGARET

No. What do you want?

JEANNIE

'Tis nothing. I thought maybe he was here. [*Catching sight of MICHAEL*] Who's that, standing there in the dark? Is it Robert Mansfield?

MARGARET

No.

JEANNIE [*peering*]

Who is it then? It's a strange young man. Ha, ha! A strange young man!

MARGARET

Go away!

JEANNIE [*half defiant, leering*]

Ha, ha! Want to be rid o' me, do ye? Want to be kissin' in the dark? . . . I know. Eh, it's well to be young!

MARGARET

Go away! My father's not here.

JEANNIE

No. He's a kind man, your father. *He* never showed me the door. "Come when ye please," he said. "There's always a welcome for ye."—But you're proud, that's what you are! Young hussy—like the rest of 'em!

[MARGARET goes to the door and holds it open]

JEANNIE

Aye. Proud. [*Harshly*] Ha, ha! It's well to be young! But I know something now. I can tell tales, maybe——

MARGARET

Go!

JEANNIE [*flashing out*]

Hussy! Turn me from your door! May you come to live in a lonely house when you're old! [*With a side-long glance at MICHAEL*] You'll have no young men with you then, in the long nights! Ha! . . . Ha! . . . Ha! . . . Ha! . . .

[*She goes out*]

MARGARET

[*Shuts the door quickly, bolting it behind her*] Ah!

[MICHAEL comes to her]

MARGARET [*in a hard voice*]

Let me be!

[*She goes to the window and sees that the curtains are closely drawn, then comes back.*]

MICHAEL

Darling, what is it?

MARGARET [*suddenly*]

Take me with you!

MICHAEL [*taken aback*]

Margaret ! What are you saying ?

MARGARET

Take me with you ! Now !

MICHAEL

But—where ?

MARGARET

Where you will. Right away from here—from all these people ! Ah ! don't you see ? I can't bear it any longer. It's choking me. . . . Let's go . . . out there . . . across the downs . . . and never come back !

MICHAEL

Dear, you said just now——

MARGARET

Ah ! Just now—what does that matter ? We were dreaming then. Now I've begun to think once more. You saw that woman's face. She made me afraid. Everything that was wonderful—she made horrible, ugly. . . . We must go !

MICHAEL

Margaret !

MARGARET

I know how it will be. I can see it all. Presently my father will come. He hates you, Michael—he could kill you. He will want me never to see you again. He'll try to make *me* hate you, too. There will only be more talk—talk that I never understand ! Don't think me a coward. It's not that. But at the end of it all I shall still want *you*—nothing but *you* ! And so, dear one, take me now !

MICHAEL

To-night ?

MARGARET

Now ! Are you ready ?

MICHAEL

I'm ready. Come !

MARGARET [*clinging to him*]

See—we'll go out there—in the dark—hand in hand !
You shall show me the way. You understand every-
thing. And if—— [*She pauses*]

MICHAEL

If what, dear ?

MARGARET [*shyly*]

If—you don't want to marry me, I'll come just the
same. My father and mother were never married. They
think that very dreadful in your world, don't they ?
[*Pause.*] There's wild blood in me, Michael ! But I love
you ! Ah, how I love you !

MICHAEL

Come, sweetheart !

[*MARGARET kisses him. Then they turn to go. A step
is heard on the gravel path outside. They move quickly
apart.*]

MICHAEL [*startled*]

What was that ?

MARGARET

Hush ! My father ! He . . . [*Some one tries the door,
then knocks loudly.*] You must go out the other way——

MICHAEL

Let me stay here. [*The knocking continues*]

MARGARET

No, no ! Do what I ask you ! That way—there's a door. Quickly ! And—listen ! Wait for me by the gate. I'll come presently. Wait there !

MICHAEL [*takes both her hands in his*]

Margaret !

[*He goes out. MARGARET goes to the other door, draws the bolts, and opens it. SHANNON comes in.*]

SHANNON

Why was the door locked ? Who was here ?

[*MARGARET is silent*]

SHANNON

I heard your voice, [*Quickly*] Who was here ? Answer me, girl !

MARGARET

Father——

SHANNON

Was it—*him* ?

[*He goes out quickly on the left, returning after a few seconds. Then he comes over to MARGARET, taking her roughly by the arm.*]

SHANNON

Maggie ! Was it *him* ?

MARGARET [*looking him in the face proudly*]
Yes, father.

SHANNON [*after a pause, dropping her arm*]
Aye. I might have known. I might have known.
[*He reaches for a chair and seats himself*]

MARGARET [*bending over him anxiously*]
Father. You're tired.

SHANNON

Let me be.

MARGARET

Your clothes are all wet——

SHANNON

Let me be, I say !

[She turns away from him. A long pause]

SHANNON *[in a low voice]*

Maggie ! *[No reply.]* Maggie ! D'ye hear me ?

MARGARET *[turning]*

Yes, father.

SHANNON *[motioning her to a chair]*

Sit ye down, child. There ! *[She obeys.]* Now. Have ye nothing to say to me ?

MARGARET *[straining toward him, full of pity]*

Father dear——

SHANNON *[sharply]*

I want none o' your soft words ! I want the truth that's in your heart !

MARGARET

Everything I say will hurt you. It's all new—and strange. And hard to tell.

SHANNON *[with an effort]*

Maggie ! Are ye still set upon—*him* ? Did ye mean what ye said this morning ?

MARGARET

Yes, father.

SHANNON

Ye've given your word to marry him ?

MARGARET

I shall keep my word, father.

SHANNON

I say ye shall not. Now listen, Maggie. I went to that house an hour ago. *His* house.

MARGARET

You ? Why ?

SHANNON

No matter why. That's my affair.—There was a flunkey came to the door, and looked me up and down as if I was a beggar from the roads. "Sir John is engaged," he says. "He can see no visitors." Turned me from the door ! Ha ! He was at his dinner, maybe. Drove me away like a dog !

MARGARET

Ah, he didn't know——

SHANNON [*fiercely*]

That's what they'll do with *you*, Maggie ! Mark my words ! They'll turn ye from the door ! D'ye think I don't know them—them and their class ? They're pitiless ! They'll move heaven and earth to save themselves, to keep their privilege and power, but they'll not lift a finger to keep *you* from the gutter ! D'ye think I'll let ye go among them, and grow to be a proud woman with a hard heart ? I'll see ye dead first !

MARGARET

Father——

SHANNON

I'm an old man, Maggie, and I know ! When ye're young, and your passions are strong within ye, the world seems bright enough. Ye're dazzled by the glitter of the rich, and their fine words——

MARGARET

No, it's not that ! It's not that !

SHANNON

But as ye grow older ye learn. Ye learn by suffering. There was your mother, Maggie—a woman of the people. When she was a peasant girl in Poland she trusted one of them. One of the rich—a Count he was, or such-like.

MARGARET

Do you mean——

SHANNON

Aye. She gave herself and everything. He took her, and cast her from him like an empty shell. Cast her off to save his name. *His* name—my God ! His name !—He left her with a dead child that she bore him.

MARGARET [*covering her face with her hands*]
Ah !

SHANNON

I've thought at times, Maggie, I would like to meet that man. God !—I would give something to have my fingers at his throat, and fling him twisting into hell ! He should learn what the hate of a lifetime means !

MARGARET

Did she love him ?

SHANNON

Your mother ? Love him ? [*Pause.*] Maybe she

thought she did. She was a young girl then, and fond of romancing. Like you.

MARGARET

Is that all that it seems to you? Romancing?

SHANNON

What else should it be? Ye know nothing o' the world, Maggie.

MARGARET

Must I know the world, then, before I can learn to love? It seems to me that when people know the world they only learn to hate.

SHANNON

Child! Ye dare to say that to *me*? What do ye know of all the joy and pain, all the gladness and sorrow that they call life? What have ye felt till now? What have ye suffered? What do ye know of *my* life—of all the years of war, the days and nights of pain? All the sweet hours and bitter, the hopes and fears and longings? What do ye know of it all, I say?—And ye sit there with your proud looks, babbling in your ignorance of love and the like!

MARGARET

It's true. I know nothing of your life. You're like a stranger to me, father dear. I know one thing only. I love Michael, and I'm going to him now.

SHANNON [*rising quickly*]

What's that?

MARGARET

I'm going to him. To Michael. Now. To-night.

SHANNON

My God, no! Maggie!

MARGARET

I must, father. Ah ! Can't you see it's the only way for us ? You'll never forgive me for loving him. You'll never forgive him for taking me from you. And his father will never forgive him either. If it had been—some one else, it would have been different. But now I must go. I've no place here any longer.

SHANNON [*in a strange tone, unsteadily*]

Maggie ! Take care how ye anger me !

MARGARET

Father, didn't you say to me only this morning, " I know whatever you choose will be right " ? Didn't you tell me you trusted me ?—Trust me now !

SHANNON

That was before I knew ye had deceived me.

MARGARET

I never deceived you. Will you only trust me as long as I do what *you* want, what *you* think right ? Is *that* what you mean by freedom ?

SHANNON [*breaking out*]

Child——!

MARGARET

No, father. " Child " no longer. That's o'er now. You said so yourself.

SHANNON

There's some devil in ye, Maggie !

MARGARET

Maybe. But I'm right all the same. Perhaps when the child goes the devil enters in.

SHANNON

Aye ! Answer me back ! But ye shall know what ye're doing ! I can tell ye how it will be. He'll take ye among his rich friends, and they'll mock at ye. His family will hate ye. They'll make your life a hell, until——

MARGARET [*breaking in*]

He's left them.

SHANNON

Eh ?

MARGARET

He's left his father, too.

SHANNON

When ?

MARGARET

To-day.

SHANNON

Because of . . . ?

MARGARET

Yes. Because of me.

SHANNON [*quickly*]

It's a lie ! It's a trick to catch ye——

MARGARET

No. He's going to London. To work there.

SHANNON

And you—— ?

MARGARET

I shall go with him. I must work too. I have so much to learn, father. I never knew how much until to-day.

SHANNON

Ah ! what are ye saying ? [*Piteously*] Maggie, don't leave me ! [*Catching her by the arm*] What have I done ? Stay with me awhile ! Not yet ! Not yet ! I can't lose ye ! Stay awhile !

MARGARET [*gently*]

If it were not to-night, it would be to-morrow or the next day, father. It would be no easier then. Isn't it easier now—to-night ?—Ah ! can't you see ? I *must* go ! It's come to that—for both of us !

SHANNON [*still holding her arm*]

Maggie ! Think what ye're doing !

MARGARET

I have thought, father. I was afraid a little while ago. Now all my fear is gone. I see it all so clearly. You have learnt what the world is like. You've lived and suffered. I'm going to live, and maybe I shall suffer too. But I must *live* ! I must live and feel as you have done. Else—what right have I here at all ? I must have all that life can give me, even if it hurts.—I can see now why I never understood the people here—Jeannie Dawes and the rest of them. I knew nothing of all the people they had loved, and all who had loved them. Now I begin to understand, because *I* can love too.

[SHANNON *stands looking at her without speaking*]

MARGARET

Dòn't be afraid for me, father dear. I can take care of myself. *You* taught me that. I shall never forget.—Good-bye.

SHANNON [*shrinking back*]

Now ?

MARGARET [*with a tremor in her voice*]
Ah, don't make it harder, father dear !

SHANNON
[*Pointing to the door, with a hoarse whisper*] Is he—
out there ?

MARGARET
Yes. Shall I call him ?

SHANNON
No, no ! [*Pause.*] Maggie, come to me ! [*She obeys.*
Slowly] Are ye sure—ye want this with all your heart ?

MARGARET [*looking him in the face*]
I am sure, father. [*Pause*]

SHANNON
Then—it's not for me to say ye're wrong. [*Painfully,*
with a great effort] Aye. Ye shall have your way.

MARGARET [*embracing him*]
Oh, father dear !

SHANNON [*disengaging himself, slowly*]
If ye'd not told me the truth, ye should never have
taken a step beyond the gate. Nor him neither. [*He*
takes a revolver from his pocket and lays it upon the table.]
I had this by me—to-day.

[*MARGARET looks from him to the table without a word*]

SHANNON
That's the last argument between men. It's laid
aside, ye see [*puts the revolver away in a drawer*]. Now
go ! Never mind your traps ! Go !

[*MARGARET takes a cloak from the pegs and slips it over*
her. Then she pauses. SHANNON stands motionless, with
his back to her. MARGARET comes over to him and takes
his hand in hers.]

SHANNON

[Turns and clasps her fiercely in his arms] Ah! Maggie! Maggie! [Kisses her.] Now go! Go quickly!

[MARGARET goes out. The door remains open, and a gust of wind from the night makes the lamp flicker. SHANNON does not look round. Presently he turns the lamp down. As it gutters lower and lower he feels his way, stumbling, to the door on the left, and passes into the other room.]

CURTAIN

THE FOURTH ACT

[*Four days later. Morning. The scene is the same as in the first act. The room is empty as the curtain rises. THOMSON appears, showing in GEORGE LATIMER and MRS. DELLING.*]

THOMSON

Sir John is in his study, sir.

GEORGE

[*About to cross over to the other door*] In here . . . ?

THOMSON

Yes, sir. He will see you at twelve o'clock.

GEORGE

Thanks. Ah—Thomson !

THOMSON [*turning*]

Yes, sir ?

GEORGE

Bad business this, Thomson. Eh ?

THOMSON [*immobile, expressionless*]
I beg pardon, sir ?

GEORGE

I said it was a bad business.

THOMSON

I don't understand you, sir.

GEORGE [*nettled*]

This—this affair of Mr. Michael's, of course.

THOMSON [*as before*]

Yes, sir.

GEORGE

Any news of them, Thomson ? Eh ?

THOMSON [*with dignity*]

I can give you no information, sir. [*He goes out*]

MRS. DELLING

Impudent man !

GEORGE

Stupid old fool ! Trying to imitate John. That's the worst of this house. He's got 'em all under his thumb.

MRS. DELLING

I'm frightfully excited. Just think—a real elopement ! So thrilling !

GEORGE [*growling*]

Wish *I* could see the fun of it.

MRS. DELLING

Oh, of course, it's dreadful for Sir John ! Poor dear !

GEORGE

What about *me* ? A nice figure *I* shall cut with a run-away nephew ! The laughing-stock of the Club——

MRS. DELLING

Ah, yes. I suppose we ought to be in mourning.

GEORGE

[*Moving about restlessly, stops short*] Eh ?

MRS. DELLING

Do you think Michael has married her ?

GEORGE

If he has, it's a disgrace to the family. I—I'll never speak to him again.

MRS. DELLING [*ingenuously*]

How dreadful !

GEORGE

And as for John—you needn't waste your sympathy on *him*. He should have had the young cub properly brought up, without any tomfoolery. His own fault from beginning to end. I shall tell him so. [*Impatiently*] Why the devil doesn't he come ?

MRS. DELLING

Dear Sir John ! I expect he's writing his book.

GEORGE [*savagely*]

Damn the book ! We can't wait all the morning for that !

MRS. DELLING

Really, George ! You forget. The whole country has been waiting ten years for it.

GEORGE

Rubbish !

MRS. DELLING

Sir John told me so himself. I thought it was *so* nice of him. He's going to send me a copy when it's published.—I *do* think men are funny !

GEORGE

He's mad ! Mad as a hatter ! Pah ! Here's Michael run off with this girl to the Lord knows where, and John does nothing. Nothing ! Sits in there scribblin' his trash like a twopenny poet !—I've a good mind to clear out and leave him to settle the whole affair himself. However, as one of the family I suppose it's my duty to get him out of the mess.

MRS. DELLING

Besides, you want some money, don't you ?

GEORGE

H'm—yes. I must screw another cheque out of the old boy. [*Looking at his watch*] Nearly twelve ! Confound it, we shall miss the first race at Newbury !

MRS. DELLING

That will save you several pounds.

GEORGE

Nonsense. Harlequin can't lose.

MRS. DELLING

I'm afraid *you* can.

[CAROLINE LATIMER *enters*. *On seeing them she pauses, confused.*]

MRS. DELLING [*going to her*]

My *dear* Miss Latimer, how dreadful for you ! We have just heard of it. Such a terrible blow ! Have you any news of the poor boy ?

CAROLINE [*seeking a way of escape*]

No. That is—no news.

MRS. DELLING

How sad ! I suppose the woman is *quite* impossible ?

CAROLINE

I—I can't tell you. John understands it all. [*Edging nervously toward the study door*] If you will excuse me——

GEORGE

[*Planting himself in her way, pompously*] Look here, Carrie, I insist upon hearing the truth about this affair ! As one of the family, I insist !

CAROLINE

I can't tell you, George.—Hush, there he is !

GEORGE [*in a bullying tone*]

That won't do ! You must know. I insist——

[*As he speaks* SIR JOHN *enters from his study.*]

SIR JOHN [*sharply*]

George ! Control yourself !

MRS. DELLING [*scenting trouble*]

Oh ! Perhaps I'd better . . . [*She slips out*]

SIR JOHN

[*To GEORGE*] Now. What have you to say to me ?

GEORGE

I want to know about Michael. Is this story true ?

SIR JOHN

What story ?

GEORGE

He was seen at Crowton Junction yesterday with the girl from Beacon Head. Has he bolted with her ?

SIR JOHN

Michael left here four days ago. I can tell you no more.

GEORGE

Are they married?

SIR JOHN

I have made no inquiries. The subject does not interest me.

GEORGE [*incoherently*]

But—Good Lord—do you mean to say you'll do nothing to stop this—this——

SIR JOHN

I have no more to add.

GEORGE

Look here, John, you must listen to common sense. Michael's been a young fool, of course. We were all of us young fools once. But I don't think you ever understood him.

SIR JOHN

Indeed?

GEORGE [*complacently*]

No. You let him run wild. A youngster like that's bound to get into a mess with the first pretty girl who makes eyes at him. As for carryin' her off . . . well, that was goin' a bit too far. But the trouble's not past mendin'. If only they're not married, you can get him out of it yet. Put the matter in your lawyer's hands.—In case of trouble with the youngsters, consult the family solicitor. It's a safe rule. Smithson's the very man—sharp as they make 'em. Have you seen him?

SIR JOHN

I have not.

GEORGE

Then take my tip—wire for him at once. He'll be on their tracks in no time. Michael won't be so lovesick now. *He'll* listen to reason all right, but you'll have some bother with the girl. She'll sue for breach o' promise, and pretty stiff damages at that, if *I* know anything of women.—Still, you can settle the case out of court. It'll be a lesson to the young beggar. He'll have to lie low for a while. Send him abroad again. But in two or three years' time—who knows? Once get him safely married to some nice girl, and nobody'll be a penny the wiser.

[He pats himself mentally on the back, delighted with this lucid analysis of the situation.]

SIR JOHN [*ominously*]

Is that what you call common sense?

GEORGE

Why not?—Now look here, John. Just leave it to me. I'll run up to town and see Smithson myself. He's steered *me* through rough water before now. Dare say you remember . . .?

SIR JOHN

I remember perfectly.—It was then that you acquired your knowledge of women.

GEORGE [*smirking*]

Well, leave it all to me. There's no time to lose. Smithson's men will get to work, and in a couple of days, barrin' accidents, you'll have the young ruffian back

here alive and kickin'.—What is it the poet says—"a sadder and a wiser man"?

SIR JOHN

I shall not accept your offer.

GEORGE [*genuinely disappointed*]

As usual. [*Rising*] But look here, John, for the sake of the family, to prevent a scandal——

SIR JOHN

The scandal is a matter of entire indifference to me. Is that all you have to say?

GEORGE [*shrugging his shoulders*]

Well, well, it's your own look-out. No use arguin'. I wash my hands of the whole affair.

SIR JOHN [*dangerously*]

Thank you.

[*Pause*]

GEORGE [*hesitating*]

There's one other trifle—just between ourselves—if I can have a word with you——

SIR JOHN

I am afraid not.

GEORGE

Just a word—between ourselves, you know——

SIR JOHN

Need I make myself clearer?

GEORGE

Eh?

SIR JOHN

Your conversation is exceedingly distasteful to me. I find your presence offensive. You will oblige me by leaving the house. *[He rings the bell]*

GEORGE *[after a startled pause]*

So that's what it's come to, is it ?

SIR JOHN

As you see.

GEORGE *[angrily]*

Then, by the Lord, I'll give you a piece o' my mind ! You've been fooled ! Fooled by your friends, fooled by every one in this house, fooled now by Michael !—And serve you right for settin' yourself up as a little tin god, with your rotten books and second-hand ideas !

CAROLINE *[scandalized, interposing]*

George ! George !

GEORGE *[ignoring her]*

Serve you damned well right ! If you had more sense and less conceit——

[THOMSON appears at the door]

SIR JOHN

Show Mr. George out.

GEORGE *[roughly]*

I can find the way myself.

[He goes. CAROLINE comes over to SIR JOHN]

SIR JOHN *[seated at the table]*

" Fooled," he said. Perhaps he was right.

CAROLINE [*anxiously*]

Oh, George was dreadful ! You must take no notice of him.—But, John, you look tired. Did you sleep last night ? [*He looks at her without replying*].—I heard you pass my door at five o'clock. You really mustn't work so hard. I'm sure it's too much for you. See—your hands are shaking. And you're all cold. I *knew* that study wasn't warm enough. I'll send Thomson in to make up the fire. And you shall have some rugs, and a cup of hot cocoa——

[SIR JOHN *utters a quick exclamation*]

CAROLINE

What is it, John ?

SIR JOHN

Is that all that is left to me now ? To be coddled by women like a sick child ? To grow to be an invalid, a creature wheeled about in a Bath chair ? To live on meanly in a household of servants, caring for nothing but comfort ? Pah ! Leave me alone ! I have my work to do.

CAROLINE

Yes, of course, dear. I know you're *very* busy. How is the book going ?

SIR JOHN

I have finished the thirty-eighth chapter.

CAROLINE [*cheerfully*]

That's right. I *am* glad.

[SIR JOHN *turns and looks at her steadily. She withers*]

CAROLINE

John, have you still nothing to say to me—about Michael?

SIR JOHN

I told you I would not have the subject mentioned again.

CAROLINE

Oh, if we *could* only get him back somehow!—Of course, it was very wrong of George to speak as he did, but he seemed to think it might be done. And I—I know this woman must be wicked.

[*She is at the point of tears*]

SIR JOHN [*firmly*]

Caroline, once more——

THOMSON [*announcing*]

Mr. Blake.

[*BLAKE enters*]

BLAKE [*to CAROLINE*]

Good morning.—Good morning, Sir John.

SIR JOHN

What is your business with me?

BLAKE

Can you give me five minutes alone?

SIR JOHN [*hesitating*]

I—I understood you were in London.

BLAKE

I have been there.

SIR JOHN

I did not expect to see you again so soon.

BLAKE

The last time we met you told me you wished never to see me again. I'm afraid I must disappoint you. [*Pause*]

SIR JOHN [*motioning to his sister*]

Caroline——

[*She goes out. SIR JOHN turns to BLAKE*]

SIR JOHN

Mr. Blake, I do not trust you.

BLAKE

I'm sorry.

SIR JOHN

I hold you partly responsible for the—the misfortune that has overtaken my son. It is clear that your influence over him has been lamentable. Also, I suspect that you know something of his present whereabouts.

BLAKE

You are quite right.

SIR JOHN [*starting*]

Ah ! Indeed !

BLAKE

I'll tell you all I can——

SIR JOHN

Pardon me. I do not wish to know. I am not interested——

BLAKE

We shall see. [*Holding out a paper*] Perhaps you'll read this?

SIR JOHN [*his hands behind his back*]

What is that paper?

BLAKE

A certificate of marriage.

SIR JOHN

A . . . ?

[*He reaches for it, but draws back and listens*]

BLAKE [*coolly*]

I see. You would rather I read it. [*Putting on his glasses*] The date—March the eleventh.

SIR JOHN [*involuntarily*]

Yesterday?

BLAKE

Yesterday morning. At the offices of the District Registrar, Barminster. [*He pauses*]

SIR JOHN

Go on.

BLAKE

The marriage of Michael Kenrick Latimer, bachelor, of Barton Priory, and Margaret Shannon, spinster, of the Cabin, Beacon Head.

[*He hands the paper to SIR JOHN*]

SIR JOHN

[*Takes it and reads. Pause*] Your name is here.

BLAKE

I had the honour of being a witness.

SIR JOHN [*suddenly*]

This is some trick ! The thing is monstrous—illegal !
The time was too short——

BLAKE

I think not. The law requires one of the parties to have been resident fifteen days in the district. I understand that Mrs. Latimer has lived here fifteen years.

SIR JOHN [*mechanically*]

Mrs. Latimer . . . ?

BLAKE

Certainly.

SIR JOHN

I—I shall not recognize this marriage !

BLAKE

It's unnecessary.

[SIR JOHN *crumples the certificate in his hand and throws it upon the floor.*]

BLAKE [*calmly, watching him*]

Fortunately that's only a copy.

SIR JOHN [*turning upon him angrily*]

Sir ! You have given me your news. Now leave this house !

BLAKE [*without moving*]

You may ring for your servants and have me thrown out if you please. I shall not go of my own accord.

SIR JOHN

This is an impertinence ! Kindly obey me at once.

BLAKE

I shall do nothing of the kind. [SIR JOHN *makes a stride toward the fire-place.*] If you ring that bell, I warn you that you will be making a great mistake.

SIR JOHN [*pauses, irresolute*]

What do you mean ?

BLAKE

You haven't heard me out.

SIR JOHN

I have heard quite enough.

BLAKE

Ah ! You can't judge of that yet. In the first place, you've evidently not received a letter from Michael. It should have reached you this morning.

SIR JOHN

I did receive a letter from him.

BLAKE

And——?

SIR JOHN

I destroyed it at once.

BLAKE

Without reading it ?

SIR JOHN

Certainly.

BLAKE

That was—wonderful. You have great strength of will. I didn't reckon upon that.

SIR JOHN

Did *you* induce him to send this letter ?

BLAKE

I did.

SIR JOHN

You were taking a great liberty, sir.

BLAKE

It's a habit of mine.

[SIR JOHN *exclaims contemptuously*]

BLAKE

And now I must give you the news myself. Michael—

SIR JOHN [*interrupting*]

What is this ?

BLAKE

The contents of the letter.

SIR JOHN

Pardon me. You will please refrain. I am resolved to hear nothing.

BLAKE [*calmly*]

Very well, Sir John. I am resolved to tell you. You may, of course, retreat into your study, or you may stop your ears. As you please. Either will be obviously undignified.

SIR JOHN

Mr. Blake, I will not be bullied.

BLAKE

That's reasonable.

SIR JOHN [*after a pause*]

You may go on.

BLAKE

Thank you. Michael wrote to tell you that he's coming here to-day. For a few hours only. He returns to town this evening.

SIR JOHN

Coming here . . . ? [*Flashing out.*] Nonsense ! I shall refuse to see him !

BLAKE

As you please.

SIR JOHN

Give me his address at once. I will telegraph——

BLAKE

You're too late. The train left Paddington an hour ago.

SIR JOHN

This is an outrage ! You are at the bottom of it, sir ! I hold you responsible.

BLAKE [*modestly*]

You flatter me, Sir John. I assure you I am a person of no importance.

SIR JOHN

Is the woman with him ?

BLAKE

His wife ? Of course ! [SIR JOHN *utters an exclamation.*] I must tell you that a similar letter has been sent to her father.

SIR JOHN

To—Shannon ?

[BLAKE *nods, watching him closely*]

SIR JOHN [*with an outburst*]

Another intrigue ! You have been working behind my back. I refuse to be a party to your schemes. I will not meet this woman. Michael must understand that once for all.

BLAKE [*looking at his watch*]

You have a few minutes more to think it over.

SIR JOHN

I have made up my mind.

BLAKE

Let's be reasonable, Sir John. You're obviously quite unfitted to play the unforgiving father. You may protest undying hatred as long as you like—it's not your part. You've been kind to every one too long to begin now to be cruel. You've always been very good to Michael. I have never known you anything but generous and thoughtful.

SIR JOHN [*curtly*]

I do not wish for your praise.

BLAKE

True. We have come to bury Cæsar——

SIR JOHN

Neither do I wish to listen to your witticisms. They are out of place.

BLAKE

Come. It's only stupid people who never forgive. You told me just now you were not interested in Michael's affairs. What about that torn paper on the floor?

SIR JOHN [*breaking down*]

You have no right to humiliate me, sir. I—I am a much older man than you. You have put me in a false position. This entanglement has been very painful to me. I should have been consulted earlier——

BLAKE

The choice still rests with you, Sir John.

SIR JOHN

There is no choice. The mischief is already done. My life's work has been destroyed. All my plans have been ruined——

BLAKE

Are you the only one?

SIR JOHN

What do you mean?

BLAKE

Are you the only one to suffer?

SIR JOHN

Who else is there . . . ?

BLAKE

Her father.

SIR JOHN

Pah ! A madman——

BLAKE

His madness is very like yours.

SIR JOHN [*indignantly*]

Sir——!

BLAKE

You were there—at his house—the other morning. You heard how he spoke of the rich—of your class. Do you think he loves you any the more *now* ?

SIR JOHN

I have given him no reason to dislike me.

BLAKE

Why do you dislike *him* ?

SIR JOHN [*stiffly*]

It is a matter of principle with me——

BLAKE

Just so. And with him. You're like two men meeting upon a narrow bridge. There's no room to pass. You're in his way. He's in yours. You stand for everything that he hates. He stands for everything that you despise. Men of principle, both of you. Philosophers among tradesmen, statesmen in a world of politicians.

Visionaries—madmen, if you please. Which of you will give way ?

SIR JOHN

You have the audacity to compare me with——?

BLAKE

Well ?

SIR JOHN

With a notorious agitator, a criminal——

BLAKE

Words, Sir John, words ! A criminal who has been imprisoned for his opinions. And an agitator who proposes—shall we say, “ a complete reconstruction of civilized life ” ?

SIR JOHN

Sir !

BLAKE [*imperturbably*]

“ A complete reconstruction. . . . ”—I think that was your phrase ?

SIR JOHN

Certainly not. That is—it is a monstrous perversion !

BLAKE [*coolly*]

Ah ! I'm sorry.

[THOMSON *comes in*]

THOMSON

There is an old man at the door, Sir John. He gives no name.

SIR JOHN

The same man—as before ?

THOMSON

Yes, Sir John.

SIR JOHN

Did he ask for me ?

THOMSON

No, Sir John. He said he wished to see his daughter.
[Pause]

SIR JOHN

Ask him to step this way. [THOMSON goes]

BLAKE [*about to follow him*]

I'll leave you alone——

SIR JOHN [*hurriedly*]

No, no ! Kindly remain. Ah—you understand, Mr. Blake, that if I consent to see this man it is not because of anything you have said——

BLAKE [*with perfect gravity*]

Of course not. I understand.

[THOMSON returns, showing in SHANNON]

THOMSON [*announcing*]

Mr.——

[SHANNON turns upon him quickly, almost pushing him aside. THOMSON gasps and goes out. SHANNON comes forward. When he speaks his voice quivers with suppressed power.]

SIR JOHN

Ah—good morning.

SHANNON

[Does not reply. His glance travels slowly from SIR JOHN to BLAKE and back again. Then] Is my girl here?

BLAKE

Not yet.

SHANNON

Twelve-thirty, she said.

[He holds a letter in his hand]

SIR JOHN [his courtesy prevailing]

Pray sit down.

SHANNON [motionless]

I will not.

[An awkward pause]

SIR JOHN

[Haltingly, to SHANNON] I understand that you—that you have been informed of what has happened?

[SHANNON is silent]

SIR JOHN

No doubt that is the cause of your visit? [Still no reply. SHANNON looks at him steadily.] I trust we shall be able to discuss the matter . . . as reasonably as possible. [Another pause. Moving toward the door.] Meanwhile, if you will excuse me a moment—I have some orders to give—

SHANNON [planting himself in his way]

Ye shall not stir!

SIR JOHN [indignant]

Mr. Shannon—

SHANNON [*bitterly*]

Aye. "Mister Shannon." My lord. Now stand there and listen to me. [*With a flash*] Or by God I'll——

SIR JOHN

I don't understand——

SHANNON

Maybe ye will when I've done with ye. The reckonin's yet to come. D'ye think I don't know that this is all a blind—this marriage and the rest of it?—All a trick to catch my girl?

SIR JOHN [*with dignity*]

Perhaps you will explain yourself?

SHANNON

I will. I said to Maggie that night, when she told me she was goin' with your son: "Maggie," I said, "I'll see ye dead before I let ye go among the rich, and grow to be like them—a proud woman with a hard heart." I would have killed her, sooner than that.—But she said to me, "He's left them," she said. "He's goin' to work for himself, and I go with him." Then I saw she was set on it, and I let her take her own road. . . . But now she writes to me that she's married to him, and they're comin' back here to-day. Not to *my* house—no fear o' that! *Here!* Aye—a pretty plan! Comin' to live here, maybe. To set themselves up with fine manners, while they spit in the faces o' the poor. Like all your cursed class! God, no! I'll see ye in hell first!

SIR JOHN

Mr. Shannon——

SHANNON

I want none o' your talk. I want my girl. It's not beggin' a favour I've come. I'll take her back with me, whether ye give her or no. [*Looking about him, with bitter contempt.*] Aye. Ye thought it would be well to have your children with ye in your old age. And grandchildren, maybe, to rule your house another hundred years. To bring them up to live your way, and think your thoughts. Well, ye shall not. I'll take Maggie back with me, and if there's a child it shall be *my* child, growin' up to live *my* way, and to fight ye as I have done. Now ye know why I am here. It's the first time I stand in this house, and the last. I take her with me this hour.

SIR JOHN

You are mistaken——

SHANNON [*defiantly*]

Am I then? We shall see.

SIR JOHN

I have not sent for your daughter. I know no more than you do yourself.

SHANNON [*facing him*]

D'ye mean—it's not your doing?

SIR JOHN

Certainly not.

SHANNON [*turning to* BLAKE]

Is that the truth he's speakin' ? [BLAKE *nods*]

SHANNON

If it's true—no, I can't believe it ! Who should have done it else ?

SIR JOHN

I object to this marriage very strongly. I was about to give orders that my son is not to be admitted. I will do so now.

SHANNON [*up in arms at once*]

And what call have *you* to object, I should like to know ? It's *me* that'll have a word to say, if it comes to objectin'. With Maggie followin' a young fool to the ends o' the earth, and listenin' to his lies !

SIR JOHN

Do you mean to imply that my son is not good enough for your daughter ?

SHANNON [*facing him*]

And what if I do ? Ye'll be sayin' next, maybe, that my girl's not good enough for your son ?

SIR JOHN

Let me tell you, sir, that my son is incapable of behaving dishonourably to any one——

SHANNON [*parrying this*]

And let *me* tell *you*, sir, that my girl's good enough for the best man in the world, rich or poor !

BLAKE [*cheerfully*]

So that's settled.

[*They both turn upon him, startled. They had forgotten his presence.*]

SIR JOHN

No. It is not settled.

[BLAKE *smiles*]

SIR JOHN [*irritably*]

I repeat—it is nothing of the kind. [*To SHANNON*]
And now, sir, perhaps you will allow me to pass?

[SHANNON *stands aside, a little dazed*. SIR JOHN *goes out*.]

BLAKE

[*After a pause, to SHANNON*] I suppose—you've been through hell?

SHANNON [*self-absorbed, looks up quickly*]

Aye. Burning hell.

BLAKE

It was fine of you to let her go.

SHANNON

I had to. I brought her up a free woman.

BLAKE

That was good. She told me.

SHANNON [*quickly*]

You've seen her?

[BLAKE *nods*]

SHANNON [*gripping his arm*]

Tell me—was she . . . ? [*He checks himself, still distrustful*.] No, I—I'll not—

BLAKE

You'll see presently.

[*Pause*]

SHANNON [*looking about him*]
Is this where he writes his books ?
[BLAKE *nods toward the study door*]

SHANNON
It's warm here. Comfortable. Aye.

BLAKE
How you hate them !

SHANNON
Who ?

BLAKE
The rich.

SHANNON [*simply*]
It's my life. I don't envy 'em. Not a farthing. Nor
their books, nor their manners, nor their fires to warm
them, nor their full bellies.

BLAKE
I know.

SHANNON
[*Is silent again. Then, as if struck with a sudden
thought*] Is it *you* that's done it all ?

BLAKE
Done what ?

SHANNON
Is it *you* that's brought them here ?

BLAKE [*temporizing*]
Well——

SHANNON [*coming close to him*]

I wonder, what sort of a man are ye? Are ye on his side, or on mine?

BLAKE

I'm on *their* side.

[SHANNON *looks at him curiously, questioning.* SIR JOHN *returns.*]

BLAKE

Any sign of them, Sir John?

SIR JOHN [*stiffly*]

I have not inquired.

BLAKE

I thought I heard them just then.

SIR JOHN

[*Excited, restless, goes to the window, then returns*] No.

BLAKE [*watching him*]

Ah! Perhaps I was wrong.

SIR JOHN [*hurriedly*]

Mr. Shannon, we must come to an understanding. I confess that the news of this marriage has distressed me greatly. I had other plans for my son—plans of a very different nature.

SHANNON [*grimly*]

Aye. I'll be bound ye had.

SIR JOHN [*his voice trembling a little*]

I had hoped—but it is too late to speak of that. You will understand my difficulty in—in——

SHANNON [*impatiently*]

Out with it !

SIR JOHN

In accepting the situation. Your own views——

SHANNON [*alert, challenging*]

Well, what's wrong with them ? Tell me that !

SIR JOHN

No doubt you mean well——

SHANNON [*contemptuously*]

Mean well !—Man, I've seen blood spilt in the streets, men and women done to death for their faith, while ye were sittin' in your arm-chair over the fire ! Now tell me that I mean well !—But it's no matter. Ye'll be rid o' me soon.

BLAKE

What ? Are you—— ?

SHANNON

Aye. I'm goin' away. Abroad. Back to the old life.

SIR JOHN [*obviously relieved*]

Indeed ?

SHANNON [*with bitter irony*]

Aye, indeed. When I've put a thousand miles between us, ye'll not trouble overmuch about my views. And then maybe ye'll get your land back again. Ye'll be spared the annoyance o' seein' Beacon Head Colony when ye look out at your windows. The place'll not last long after I'm gone. It's a one-man show.

BLAKE

Like yours, Sir John.

SIR JOHN [*turning*]

I beg your pardon ?

BLAKE

Like yours, I said. *Your* one-man show.

[SIR JOHN *is about to reply, but SHANNON goes on.*]

SHANNON

Take back your land. Plough it up for corn. Break down the houses, and burn them for firewood if ye please.—But ye'll never destroy the life that was there. Ye'll never buy *that*. It's war between us yet, until the day o' judgment.

SIR JOHN [*after a pause*]

You are very bitter, Mr. Shannon.

SHANNON

[*In an altered tone, slowly*] Am I ? [*Pause.*] Aye, maybe ye're right. There's little use in talk between you and me.

BLAKE

That's true.

SHANNON

[*Turning upon him suddenly*] Eh ?

SIR JOHN [*at the same time*]

I beg your pardon ?

BLAKE

Ah, you revolutionists !

SIR JOHN

I ?

SHANNON

Him ?

BLAKE

Both of you. What else do you call yourselves ? Don't you both want to turn the world upside-down ? What does it matter that you try to tilt it different ways ? The principle's the same—revolution. Red revolution, Sir John.

SIR JOHN

Sir !

SHANNON

Young man !

BLAKE

There, you see, you agree, even in flying at my throat together ! What is it that stands between you ? [*They are both about to interrupt him.*] Oh, I know ! It's the world, the whole world between you. A world of muddle and disorder, with its mob of rich and poor together. A lazy, cowardly world, that doesn't care for you and your eternal war.—Well, make it care ! Write your books. Fight your quarrel out to the end.—But not now. Not here and not to-day. You may get the world to listen, but you'll never make each other understand.

SIR JOHN [*sharply*]

Your remarks are unnecessary, sir.

BLAKE

True. I give it up.

[*He turns away*]

SIR JOHN [to SHANNON]

And now——

[BLAKE, *at the window, utters an exclamation*]

SIR JOHN [*turning hastily*]

What was that? Are they——?

BLAKE [*nods*]

In the lane. They must have come across the fields.

[SHANNON and SIR JOHN both move hastily toward the window, but each checks himself on observing the other. *Pause.*]

BLAKE [*at the door*]

Well?

SIR JOHN

Where are you going?

BLAKE

To meet them.

SIR JOHN [*hurriedly*]

No, no! Stay——

BLAKE

Nothing will stop me, Sir John.

[*He goes out.* SIR JOHN and SHANNON find themselves facing one another, both restless and eager to be gone, but neither willing to admit impatience. SIR JOHN speaks at last.]

SIR JOHN [*with an effort*]

Mr. Shannon. I think there is no more to be said. Shall we—join them?

SHANNON

Aye.

[SIR JOHN *holds the door open for him courteously. SHANNON turns in passing him, looks him in the face, and makes a movement to hold out his hand, but draws it back again in half defiance and goes out. SIR JOHN follows him hastily.*]

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